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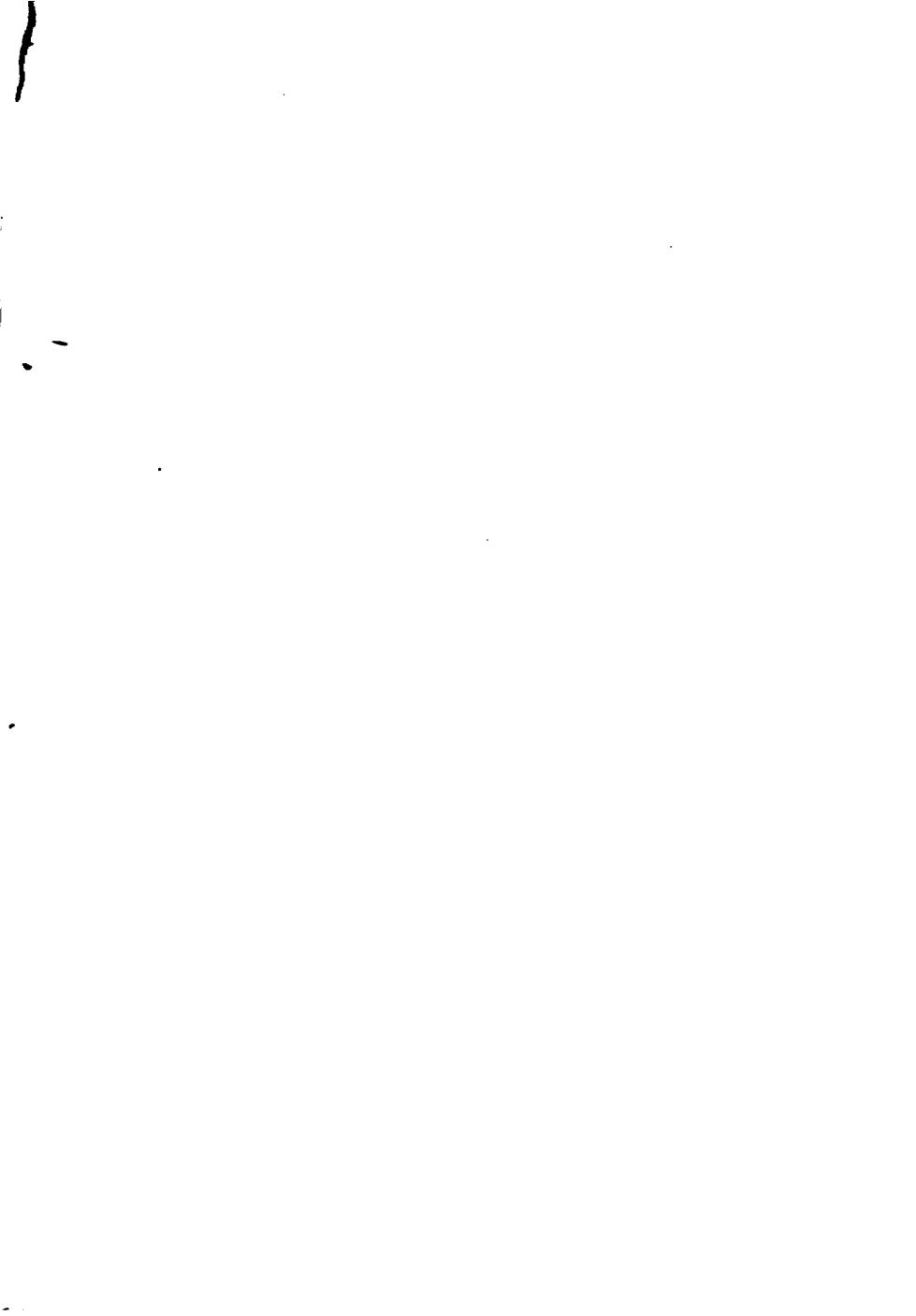
BRUTE GODS



LOUIS WILKINSON

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BRUTE GODS



NOVELS BY LOUIS WILKINSON

A CHASTE MAN

THE BUFFOON

BRUTE GODS



LOUIS
WILKINSON

BRUTE
GODS

"Ask, is Love divine?"

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To
GEORGE MOOR
Marking the Coming-of-Age
Of an Unbroken Friendship.

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CONFUSIONS

CHAPTER I

THE terrible calamity fallen upon the house of Glaive had sent the master of that house post-haste to his lawyers in London. Mr. Sidney Starr Glaive, estate-agent to the Marquis of Yetminster, had never been so baffled, never so deeply angered, never so humiliated. He had protracted his absence and those fruitless but sympathetic discussions with the lawyers for a considerably longer time than was warrantable, except by his strong disinclination to face the people of his neighbourhood. His younger son had given him an excuse for delay. The boy was finishing his last term at school: he was yet to be informed of the tragic family event, and his father could reasonably wait until the term ended, meet Alec at Paddington Station and break the news to him as they travelled down to Suffolk together.

On the morning after this return Mr. Glaive was reading Prayers. He addressed his two sons, his widowed sister, and his servants, in tones of combative assertion of dignity, teased and pulled at by spleen. He was consoled, dimly, by his sense of the drama of the occasion, by the jumping and stiffening of his response to the scene—so familiar, those kneeling domestic figures, under his presidency, and now that empty chair—ah!

The thought, rushing, caught him: how carefully he had chosen this second wife of his, this stepmother for his children! He had chosen her for her tenderness, for her soft dependent ways, for her large devoted wistful eyes that promised him the straitest fidelity, a fidelity almost fanatical. She had had such a sensitive trustful mouth, the lips rather tremulously apart. He had been old enough then, this little man with his little fierce fires, to give discretion the whip-hand of mere passion: it had been a sage choice, a choice guided by brain, by experience. . . . So now it was not alone his pride of property that was injured, but his pride of judgment. . . . Mr. Glaive choked. Instantaneously convinced that he was suffering from the emotion of a strong smitten man, he passed his Prayerbook silently to his elder son. He constrained his lips. "A motherless home!" he said to himself, taking comfort in the appeal of the phrase.

Mervyn read aloud the holy words as rapidly as he could. He was extremely hungry. The morning's disorganization had delayed Prayers and breakfast. Mr. Glaive watched his son with growing irritation. He took the book from him, just as the boy was beginning a new prayer. Mr. Glaive turned the page: "The blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ," he read in a vexed dry voice, "the love of God, and"—he snapped viciously on—"the fellowship of the Holy Ghost . . . world without end, Amen. Johnson, why are you here?"

The under-gardener had already opened the door.

"Beg pardon, sir—" He hesitated awkwardly.
 "Thought as I might fare to come into Prayers 'smornin', sir."

"You never do. I mean you only come on Sundays. You know perfectly well that only the maids attend Prayers on week-days."

"Yes, sir. Seemed sort o' like a Sunday today, sir."

"You can go, Johnson."

"Thought he'd better make up the quorum, I s'pose," Mervyn whispered to his younger brother. There was silence as the rest of the servants walked out with self-conscious solemnity. As the door shut, Alec heard, faintly, the kitchenmaid's giggle. It reminded him of the girl's cousin, "Frippie" Clark,—she had been christened "Elfrida,"—a wench of the village. The boys' aunt kept looking over her brother's head, with nervous glances of a fretful reprobation which she enjoyed.

"What beastly weather." Mervyn fastened the two bottom buttons of his corduroy waistcoat. His father gave him a carefully dramatic glance of austerity tempered by grief. Alec, irritated by the thinned-out discontent that his aunt cherished, walked away to the end of the room, and sat down in the alcove, by the small-sized billiard-table. Outside, a sparse rain, weakly persistent, was wetting the disconsolate Suffolk landscape. The youth turned back, resting his eyes on the legs of the billiard-table. He observed Nature no more closely than do most boys brought up in the country. Mervyn, joining him,

whispered: "Christ! Nice weather for an elopement."

"Shut up." Alec's lip trembled.

"For God's sake don't go and have a fit of the giggles."

"I'm not. Do shut up.—It's bad enough the way you fool in Church. You're awful; always nearly making me laugh in the middle of reading the Lessons."

"You did, that last time, practically. Your bloomin' silly voice cracked. Why the devil don't you have more self-control? If you get a laughing-fit now, the old man'll stick the bread-knife into you."

"Well, you shut up, and I won't laugh."

"'Didn't know I was a humourist."

"Oh, just now anything'd make one laugh, with all this rumpus. You know how it is."

"That's rich. I suppose one's Mater runnin' away with a chap is enough to make a cat laugh, anyhow—"

"Oh, *do* shut up!" Alec smoothed his quivering mouth with his hands, turned his head, and gulped.

"Come to breakfast, you boys!" Mr. Glaive called them. "What's all that whispering about?" He shot his little fired eyes from one to the other.

"After all," Mervyn lowered his voice still more, "you can hardly blame the Mater, can you?"

"What's that?"

"Oh, I'm hungry, that's all."

"Hungry? That's either impertinence, or else ut-

ter lack of feeling. For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful. The fearful blow that has fallen upon us, and all you can think about is whether you're hungry." The aunt put her bowl of porridge from her. "I've noticed that your self-indulgence has got worse and worse ever since you left the Army." He poured cream into his porridge. "You could rough it well enough out there, couldn't you? Now you come back and you want to turn everything into a—er—into a veritable sty of Epicurus."

"Sort of a garden he had, though, wasn't it?" Mervyn queried vaguely. Alec was in agony.

"The general atmosphere—the *general atmosphere*—is— It's altogether unspeakable. Moral atmosphere. The amount of looseness, of vicious self-indulgence. I never did believe that it was the right thing for women to go earning their own living. Why, there are married women now—many of them—who do it. Disgraceful—degrading to their husbands. They'll find that out, soon enough. That's a large part of our present trouble."

"Earning her own living?" Mrs. Mowry, the aunt, looked up, deprecating. "But, my dear Sidney, surely *that* wasn't—"

Her brother glared at her, and she dropped her spoon. "I can't eat," she remarked, concentrating her gaze on the heavy spoonful of porridge and cream that went its automatic way to Mr. Glaive's red-moustached lips.

"We are not urging you to eat, Catherine.—I sup-

pose it is impossible for some people to understand a detached and general conversation. I was taking a wide view of the state of our times. I hope I can lift myself above my own personal griefs and injuries. They have never yet affected my judgment. Women are incapable of that kind of detachment. Entirely incapable. What I have to say about this personal matter I shall say to you all at the right time, in proper place. You will kindly be in my Study at eleven o'clock this morning. And—" He lowered his pale sparse eyebrows with their obstinate projecting hairs showing like hairs that pierce through a thin sock: he looked hard at his sister. "Catherine: I must ask you not to refer to the subject in any sort of way. I am sorry that I should need to ask you. I should have thought—while we are at breakfast—"

"'Mixin' it all up with the porridge," Mervyn dolefully whispered.

Alec choked, and caught his napkin to his mouth. He gave out a suppressed sound like a whinny. His father regarded the boys in astonishment and rage.

"Unpardonable!" he exclaimed. "Ungentlemanly. You take a mean advantage of my deafness. I won't ask you what you said, Mervyn. You would only tell me an untruth. Alec: you think it's behaving like a gentleman to sit there and neigh like a mare? I will *not* have such conduct at my table. A scene of this kind—this morning." In deep distaste of the actual fact, he gave a moment's survey to the contrasting and becoming picture which should have been presented by the family on that occasion.

"You are both utterly without—" Alec could bear his torture of suppression no longer. "Yes, I'm glad you retain decency enough to leave the table."

"I can eat nothing, Sidney," Mrs. Mowry faltered, upturning her weak obstinate face. "You will excuse me, too?" Mr. Glaive nodded.

He was left alone with Mervyn. No longer obliged to regard a general family effect, and anxious to get his son on his side, he changed his manner.

"My boy, I want your—er—support. I'll be perfectly frank. I need you. I can't stand alone—not at my age—not under a blow like this. I'm not a weakling, I hope, but there are times when a man must lean—or, well, to some extent depend—on his son. Alec's a baby. You're a man grown. You had a year of the war: in a way, I suppose, you've 'seen life' more than I have. Now we must look this horrible business in the face. Of course we shall be exposed to ridicule—"

"Good Lord! Is there any chance of their gettin' wind of it up at Magdalen?" Mervyn's blue eyes clouded.

"At Magdalen? I was thinking, of course, of our neighbourhood. Oxford's some way off."

"What exactly did old Keeling advise? Will you get a divorce?"

"Oh—why, yes, yes, of course, certainly. I must—er—vindicate myself. Keeling—well, of course, Keeling—"

Mervyn, forgetting for the moment his cultivated civilian slouch, got up and helped himself to some

cold ham from the sideboard. His military figure, so straightly yet so easily poised, was in agreeable contrast with his lounging dress—the soft grey cloth coat, the loosely knotted bow tie, the flannel trousers of a lighter shade of grey, the elegant light-coloured socks and brown leather slippers. His wavy hair was almost flaxen, worn rather long.

His father watched him, with a half-suppressed fleck of envy in his narrowed shrewd glance. His day was over, but he felt damnably capable of being young; the more so for Mrs. Glaive's desertion of him.

"I can't let that scoundrel get off so easily, can I?"

"Well, I shouldn't go makin' any—you know, too much beastly fuss about the thing." Mervyn cut his ham deliberately.

Mr. Glaive stood up by the mantelpiece. He raised himself on his toes.

"The worm! He ought to pay for it; he'll have to. Keeling & Marshall would get me thumping damages." He squinted down his nose. "Look here: look at this letter I found in her room. Shows just the kind of slimy underhanded—"

"I say, don't let's go reading his beastly letters—"

"My dear lady—that's how he started it. 'My dear lady'!"

"Well, he writes novels or something, don't he?"

"Your stepmother could receive a letter like this. No doubt she *liked* getting it. The gross ingratitude and deception. I tell you, my boy, I never could

have believed—And that kind of a man! To think of her consenting to read such stuff as this!” Mr. Glaive was happier now. “‘I have not seldom thought of what you told me,’” he began reading.

“What’s that? Why couldn’t the fool have said ‘often’?”

“My dear Mervyn, that’s the literary touch.” Mr. Glaive was enjoying himself. Little sarcasms always re-established his self-esteem. “‘And believe me, I have thought in sympathy.’” He read with twisted lips, in a whining drawl. “‘If I may without presumption offer you my sympathy, then I beg of you to accept it. Sometimes even one who is comparatively a stranger may make this offer, and the touch of a hand, even though it be only for a brief instant in passing, may do somewhat toward healing.’ Really, Mervyn, I must apologize for reading this to you while you’re eating your breakfast. ‘In suffering of the spirit there is an appeal that is wide as the spirit itself: you were right to say the word to me—more right, perhaps, than if we had been more intimately acquainted.’”

“When is this bilge dated?”

“There’s no date and no address. The fellow never puts them. Much too undistinguished and commercial for a man of letters to think of dates. His mind’s too full of the beautiful things he’s going to write, especially when he’s writing to a lovely lady! Heh! Postmark’s end of May—about two months ago.—You see, she must have written to him without my knowledge.—‘I feel that I must answer

your letter—' 'Epistle' would have been a daintier term, Mervyn, don't you think?—'must answer by something more than the silent thought that you have already—as you will know—had from me.' "

Mervyn finished his last cup of coffee and squeaked his chair.

"Nearly finished. He didn't use more than one sheet, at that stage. Didn't want to overdo the effect." The man's reddish eyes glistened. "The last sentence, that's a gem. 'My hope is that your ways may win through light that grows, on to peace.' "

"My God!"

"A master of English, Mervyn. 'Thanking you for your letter'—he underlines 'thanking'—'Believe me, my dear friend, most sincerely your well-wisher, Hugh Halley Carlyon-Williams.' "

"Well, I wouldn't trouble any more about a chap like that. Why not let the thing go? What's the point? He's not worth—"

"Yes, but how about *her*? That's what hits me, my boy." Mr. Glaive deepened his voice. "The hideous ingratitude of it. I had given her everything—freely—as you know. An old and honourable name, a position in the county—not wealth, but ample sufficiency; she lacked for nothing. My constant affection and consideration. Why—I can say it to you, Mervyn, you're a man—I considered her delicacy of health—so far as to spare her from—ah—maternity: even though Dr. Resine—er—waived the matter, I thought it better to avoid the risk—for her sake. Are there many husbands—I ask you?"

My constant indulgence—for five years. And she can write to that cur about ‘spiritual suffering.’ Make-believe! Women grow discontented if they’re well treated, that’s it. Just because I didn’t palaver like that bounder! Because I’m a plain man, and not a monkey.” He pulled down his mustard-coloured waistcoat with a virile gesture. “No gentleman could have written such stuff. ‘Hugh Halley’!” He ejected the name in a thin whistle. “Women don’t recognize a gentleman—don’t know his value—any cad can catch them. Well, she’ll degrade.”

“I s’pose he’ll still go on writin’ about what the war has done for our ideals and our art an’ that sort of thing.”

“Let him. This thing will hit him, though. The British Public won’t stand hypocrisy. Let him try to make them believe that adultery is one of the new ideals—let him see! We’ll stamp on him. There are some men who want boot-prints on their faces—with the heel in their mouths. Swine! Thank God, Christianity isn’t dead yet—Christian morality isn’t dead, I have that on my side.”

“I don’t know so much. Williams is the sort of chap who can get out of anything. He’ll be as moral as any of them about it all. And the laugh’ll be on us. You know what you said, ridicule and that.”

“I don’t care. I’ll bring action. It’ll hurt him more than me. We’re in for the scandal, anyhow.” people in Suffolk were taking the “scandal”; but he He hesitated, wanting to know from Mervyn how could not bring himself to ask. He construed his

cowardice as dignity. "I must defend our honour," he added.

"All right. I'd think it over, though. When things get into the papers, it makes all the difference. Williams is pretty well known. He wouldn't mind—"

"Gad, yes: he'd make speeches in court, and all the ladies would say what a beautiful voice!"

"Good advertisement. For him, not for us. He'd get back ten times any damages, and he knows it. Probably write a book about the case—'unwritten law'—you know the kind of thing."

"It's monstrous, Mervyn; a monstrous injustice. The most outrageous thing is that she can keep her own money—all of it. Why, it makes me feel dead ashamed of English law! But I shall sue." Mr. Glaive was getting angry again. "I believe in doing the right thing regardless of consequences. I'd get thumping damages, whatever he might make out of it afterwards. I'd score in that. He'd bleat at having to pay ten or fifteen thousand, wouldn't he, eh? What d'you think?"

"I'd wait a bit."

"Wait? Well, anyhow, there's the present to be thought of. I suppose I shall have to have a house-keeper." Mr. Glaive's mouth loosened, and he looked down his nose again. "Your aunt's useless.—Now, to take things from your point of view: this affair has thrown a burden on you. A sort of moral burden. We have to show people that we're not tarred with the same dirty brush, you see that? Make Alec see

that! He'll have to be precious careful how he behaves in the neighbourhood. You're two good-looking boys—no harm my telling you that—and of course I know what temptation is. I don't pretend to be a stone. People'll be on the look-out. Of course you're engaged. I wasn't thinking of you, of course not. But I hope you've been careful how you talk. Ignore the affair, of course. Be distant if any one takes up too sympathetic an attitude, especially if it's a social inferior. That's the most dignified way—the best bred way. Never forget that you're a Glaive."

"Oh, Lord," thought Mervyn, "now we're in for the great Glaive sermon."

"The Glaives are as good as the Freyles. They're better. The baronetcy's really older than any of their titles. Dates back before any of Lord Yetminster's ancestors were heard of. I should never dream of mentioning it outside the family, of course. But a man should realize his birth, especially in these times. It makes all the difference in the world. We can hold up our heads, whatever happens. Carlyon-Williams! I should like to know of any Carlyon-Williams who's legally entitled to bear arms! Contemptible fellows. How she could—Reminds me of *Hamlet*. 'Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed, And batten on this moor?' "

He gave his short stature a gesture of affirmation. Mervyn's lip twitched, as he glanced at the "fair mountain." He wished Alec had been there.

"We have our family faults. We're quick-tempered—excitable—too passionate, perhaps. Our

blood runs hot. But no Glaive has ever been guilty of a mean or a base action." He spoke with unpugnable sincerity. "We've always supported the great Causes, the great traditions. Fought for Cromwell, helped William of Orange to the throne, supported the Protestant Church and the Constitution—father to son. Freedom within the law: faith without superstition. The foundations of a good life are ours by inheritance. We've never known disgrace or dishonour, never broken faith—"

Mervyn yawned. All this was meaningless to him. He began wondering what his father would do when he found out how much he owed the Oxford tradesmen.

"Remember that we can't be disgraced. We take disgrace and make a glory of it! That's the spirit! Williams!—What do you think, my boy, do you think they'd give five thousand damages? More, perhaps? He'd feel it more if he were older, though. You know what they say. When a man's twenty, he wants to look well, when he's thirty he wants to do well—when he's forty, to be well—when he's fifty, to 'cut up' well. Not true, that, though," he added hurriedly. "I'm not thinking of 'cutting up' yet, I've my time.—Don't you go looking at me as though I were an octogenarian. When a man's only about fifty, he isn't dead yet, is he? Well—" Mervyn was obviously restless. "Be on your guard. Remember your name. Hold up Alec's head for him, and don't let your aunt make more of a fool of her-

self than she has to—poor creature! Of course she—”

The door opened. “His lordship is in the Study, sir.”

“Ah. Yes, yes, of course. I might have expected—” Mr. Glaive looked gratified: he turned to the mirror, fiddled with his horse-shoe pin, smoothed his faded yellowish hair. “Of course he would come. Motor over to Bloyce’s, Mervyn, and get that mortgage business settled. Your law ought to be fresher than mine. Get back by eleven, if you can. But we’ll wait for you.”

Mervyn rose as his father went to receive the condolences of the Marquis. Mr. Glaive, in his neatly cut morning coat and his taut check trousers, left the room carrying his little head rather to one side, and further stating himself with his spry and wary back. The door stayed open, and the boy and the servant heard something of the preliminary approaches: “I wished to express to you personally—following my letter—most sincere sympathies—great shock to us—you know the great regard—Lady Yetminster and I—always your friends—” Then from the husband and father, in a voice sharpened by excitement: “I am very much touched—do indeed appreciate, and thank you—act of real friendship—in fact, Lord Yetminster, I’m quite incapable of expressing what I feel—” The Study door closed.

Mervyn threw open the French window and walked out on to the drive. It had stopped raining.

He whistled, and soon his brother joined him, with flushed face and indignant eyes.

"You perfect ass," said Alec. "I've been waiting about to get in and finish my breakfast, but you and he would keep on jabbering. 'Don't want to go now, though. Sick of waiting.'"

"I can't help it. You will do these things. You ought to know by now that it isn't behaving like a gentleman to neigh like a mare."

"Oh, shut up. You can't make me laugh now. You might be as funny as you could stick together, and it wouldn't make me laugh. Just because it wouldn't matter if I did, I suppose. How damn silly! — What did he say?" They walked down towards the garage.

"Oh, the usual gag. Business about bein' a blasted Glaive. And you're to keep up the honour of the family, after this, by not takin' any notice of girls and always talkin' proper. Dear old dad isn't sure if he'll get enough cash out of Williams to make it worth while, but if he can annoy the chap badly, he may bring action anyhow. I'm against it. It'd be a horrid nuisance, particularly while I'm up at Oxford. Don't think the old bird'll do it, but he'd make himself damn uncomfortable, so's to hit Williams."

"You seem cheerful enough. I don't half like it. Why, it's the sort of thing that hardly ever happens. We shall both look awful fools—"

"Oh, what's the odds? You ought to have been a few years older. After you've been mixed up in that

mess, all you want is to live an' have a good time, an' never see a uniform. I shan't ever give or take a salute again, that's enough for me. War's over. What's the odds?—Wake up in a bed, have a bath and be a civilian. You don't think anything of a little thing like this. She isn't our mother, either. And anyhow nothing's worth fussing over. 'Pity Williams is such an ass, though."

Alec, puzzled, scrutinized his brother. He did not at all understand how deeply, yet how lightly and amiably, Mervyn was disillusioned. "I see the Rat's come," he said.

"Yes; with the old man in the Study now. I've got to drive over to Bloyce's."

"Auntie's guzzling in her room. She got Mogg-ridge to send her breakfast up."

"'Course she did. Any one could see she was really as hungry as a whale. 'Wish she'd eloped instead of the Mater. I hate Aunt Cathy worst of all my aunts, but I s'pose that's only because she lives with us. If I wasn't as lazy as a tortoise I'd clear out and get something to do in London. 'Don't fancy trottin' round seein' after the Rat's tenants all my life—just like the guv'nor. But, Lord, what's the odds? Comin' along?"

"No, don't think so."

"Well, don't go messin' about with Frippie. She's a rotter, anyhow. Some fellow's gone and bitten her chin already."

Mervyn sauntered off. Alec's face grew grave and troubled. He walked away, over the lawn,

through the gate that led into the field—a youth somewhat over-tall, with an undisciplined figure. Girls who liked him thought of his eyes, which were of a very dark brown—impressionable eyes, and large; contrasting startlingly with his russet hair that had enough light of gold in it for him to have been called “Carrots” at school. A less hackneyed nickname was “Autumn Tints.” His face was long, and high-coloured: he blushed very easily, to a tormentingly vivid scarlet. His round chin hinted weakness of will, but this suggestion was modified, at least, by a certain grimness and almost bitterness often showing in the close lines of his mouth—a small mouth, though with full enough lips. He baffled prediction, so evidently exposed as he was, so susceptible to change, so ready for any one of a score of diverse moulds. But “volatile” was not the word to touch him: his surrender to influence would be too seriously made, with too much energy; and he would colour each influence with himself, subdue it to himself, perhaps. His long legs now took him rapidly over the field towards Father Collett’s Vicarage. “You can hardly blame the Mater.” Mervyn’s careless words had gone deep, Alec struck out from them, and was lost. His mind swam in the first surge of the event, but could not breast eddies nor touch bottom. His step-mother—He tried, wonderingly, to see her. . . .

Mrs. Glaive’s adulterous desertion had postponed Aunt Catherine’s breakfast—a trifling piece of discomfort for the heartfelt satisfaction she had had in a surprise so stirring: it had set the brain of the

master of the house working keen on nice balances of loss and profit, in the intervals of self-dedication to Christian morality: the settled Mervyn's amiable securities it had sensibly though not too rudely ruffled. In Alec, the sense of the "calamity" began to vex for organic growth.

CHAPTER II

ALEC crossed the road from the field and struck out skirting the Golf Course. The flat treeless drained marshland was roughened and brightened by bushes of lively yellow gorse. Their lavish buxom odour assailed him, in blend with the smart-tasting sea air. All this could not help: it could stand anything—any beastly thing that might happen. That impudent excessive shouting gorse! If only he could insult this "Nature," which had become really noticeable to him now for the first time. Alec swished his stick through one of the clumps, scattering the offensive bright stuff. He remembered the Suffolk boy who had been found beating a toad and calling out, between the strokes: "I'll larn yer to be a toad, I'll larn yer!" Perhaps that boy was angry with some one else. But it was not so much that Alec was angry with his father; such mere anger would not, of course, have been unusual for him. His emotion was one of new and highly conscious hatred. He was overpowered by and wondering at this quickening of hatred as a woman is by the quickening of a child: it was a portent of growth, significant, disquieting, uncertain; it was something that would grow not only in itself, but in other parts of him, in very much else. . . .

As Alec walked, he did not think at all of his step-

mother, but his father emerged for him rapidly and continuously in a score of those repeated postures of the past. He saw him in his morning irritability, glinting his liverish eye from point to point of the room during the assembling for Prayers, then pouncing with the sharpened little claws of his sarcastic and malevolent speech. "Is there some cryptic reason, Mervyn, for your turning yourself into a public advertisement of brainless vanity? That necktie and those socks *may* serve some other purpose, but if they do, it is hidden from me."—"What is the point, Alec, of that ridiculous pose you've taken to lately of folding your arms? I see you've even gone to the lengths of perpetuating yourself in a photograph in that attitude."—"Catherine, do pray use some sort of endeavour not to commit yourself to further folly."

There was no personal peculiarity of any one of the three of them that he did not customarily gibe at, with intent. He knew just where the nerves were that would respond with sensitive and continued vibration. Alec, in retrospect, smarted most keenly under the memories of his earlier boyhood, fed his hate most on them. He recalled the time when he used to have dancing lessons. "Well, my little dancing-man! Strike up! Tra-la-la, fol-de-roll!" His father would skip and jump on the hearthrug, grotesquely encircling an imaginary partner, contorting his lips to the parody of a social smile.—There used to be Shakespeare readings, with a group of neighbours sitting round the drawing-room of one

or another of their houses. His father always took the most prominent part, he would read with extraordinary cleverness, with a brilliant sense of certain values of the characters. "Your interpretation of Jacques—it's masterly, Mr. Glaive—masterly!" Mrs. Bevan, the retired actress, had complimented him: Alec could see clearly the deprecating bend of his father's head, his creeping smile. . . . Alec had had to read "Silvius," the shepherd. His father had made him rehearse before the family. He knew that the boy, being then at the most sensitive and morbid period of the awkward age, could hardly be trusted to make Silvius's declarations of love expressively without a little practice. "Oh, Phebe, Phebe, Phebe!" the lad read, in a cracking voice, his cheeks throbbing. "Oh, feeble, feeble, feeble!" his father shot out, with again that familiar creeping smile. At the meeting itself, Alec had read sullenly and monotonously. "If you want everybody to think you a numskull, that's the way to do it!" Mr. Glaive had been too much occupied with his own triumph as Jacques to make any further comment then. Mervyn had played truant, his part had been read by some one else, Alec envying him his courage. Later on, he had followed its example.

At about fifteen he had begun his defiance, when he had set himself stubbornly not to allow that moistening sting of his eyes to help his father's favourable occasions. He would leave the room. "You cannot go when I'm talking to you, sir: haven't you the manners of a gentleman?" To counter this rebellion,

Mr. Glaive had stopped his son's pocket money—"until you see fit to apologize for your rudeness." "Stop it for ever, then!" Alec had told him, bringing home the unpleasing fact that the son was growing up out of former reach. The punishment did not last long. "Stopped your pocket money, has he, the old skinflint!" young Lord Aldborough, Lord Yetminster's son, had observed to Alec under the Study window. Mr. Glaive overheard, and in a few days he handed out the boy's allowance with an air of large generosity. "An act of grace," he had said: "but remember, when you choose to be stubborn in later life, you won't always have a *father* to deal with. I can't treat you now as though you'd reached a responsible age." He could not stand being censured for parsimony by a young Earl.

Lord Aldborough—Lord Yetminster—Lord Charles Freyle—Lord Derek—Lady Barbara—how they had overflowed on them, those people—swamped them. Alec's father's house and everything in it seemed a sort of backwash from Lord Yetminster's great "country seat." And Alec's father, for all that perpetual insistence of his—"A Glaive is as good as a Freyle, and better"—all the more, indeed, for that assertive repetition, his father seemed responsible for their shadowed situation, guilty of it. The boy did not ask why, nor how, but he bitterly felt that any man with real pride would not have put himself and his family under that big rich house, under all those titles that towered and bristled. It was not that any of the Freyles emphasized their rank: they did not,

not even Lord Aldborough, who was the only one at all inclined to arrogance. It was Alec's father who was for ever putting his sons into that discomfiting conscious relation to the Marquisate and its appanages. Members of the Freyle family had loomed heavily for Mervyn and Alec almost from their infancy. "*Never* say 'Lord Freyle.' Only outsiders and foreigners do that. 'Lord *Charles* Freyle.' Saying 'Lord Freyle' will stamp you as a bounder at once, remember that, Mervyn." "In conversation you say 'Lord Yetminster'; in addressing an envelope put the full title. You see, as I've just written it. Same with Lord Aldborough—'The Earl of Aldborough' only in addressing letters. You boys drop the title when you're with him, of course: you're near enough to his age."

They were all "equals": how his father had rubbed that in! And his father lied; they weren't equals. Even if the Glaive family had been older—and it was not; Alec's uncle always laughed at the pretension—but even if it had been, there were hundreds of distant cousins to baronets, and marquises were rare. Sir Julian was an impoverished degraded baronet, too, he associated chiefly with jockeys and horsey adventurers, no one of his own class had anything to do with him, he was a drunken red-jowled "sport," with all the usual vices. He was the third baronet, the creation being mere Victorian, given for contributions to the Liberal Party chest. That old fake of its being a revival of a title extinct since James the Second! Alec's resentment grew still more

hostile.—The Freyles didn't regard them as equals, Aldborough had called formally on Mervyn at Oxford, and with Mervyn's return call there was an end of the matter. He knew Mervyn as his father's agent's son at home, but that was no reason for his knowing him anywhere else. And the "county people" didn't think them "equals." Their old name! Why, even if it had been old—Jim Bovey, the cobbler, was a blood-relative of Lord Beauvais, Alec had heard Lord Beauvais say he was practically certain of it. It wasn't your name that counted, it was your position; any one could see that, yet his father had fooled them with these false values, exposed them to all the choking bitterness of snobbery, handicapped them at the start, stopped their breath for the race. No wonder the Mater couldn't stand it—that and everything else—

It had been stupid and cruel. Alec's friend Wilfred Vail had first made him see these things, had cured him of this Glaive pretentiousness. "We middleclass people," Vail would say, shocking Alec terribly in their early acquaintanceship. "I thought tradesmen were middleclass," he had replied. "Oh, 'upper middleclass' for us, if you insist on it, my dear boy!" Alec saw very soon how much easier Wilfred's undervaluation of his social position made life for him, how it freed him from strain and left him open to the flow of his interests. He could figure his father's consciousness, in Vail's place, of the fact that all his "people" had belonged to the recognized professions, and that his great-uncle had been Lord

Chancellor. But Vail drew his straight line between himself and the county families; drew it as sharp and black-clear as one of the lines in his excellent mechanical diagrams. He had a singularly French mind, a mind of certainties, bent on simplification of issues by accuracy and logic.

Unwittingly, Wilfred Vail had opened Alec's eyes to this particular wrong done him by his father, this ridiculous entangling of him in pretence. His father's vanity needed lies for its support, and the nurturing of a family on those lies lent them substance of conviction, strengthened them for their mean ministrations. Alec had come to realize this, from Wilfred, a year ago; he had condemned his father then, resenting him, despising him, angry that he and Mervyn should have been set thus blindfolded and befooled in the way of worldly ridicule. Every one in East Suffolk had heard the story of Mrs. Conyers and her Manx kitten: smart little Mrs. Conyers on the Station platform, dumping the grotesque little tailless beast into a corner of her carriage, with: "Now, then, Tips, behave: remember you're a Manx!" This and other such humorous satiric strokes of the neighbourhood had gained point and sting for Alec since his friendship with Wilfred Vail.

But the illumination of this present event was much more powerful. It revealed the past under a much broader gauge of light, it threw meaningly into their mutual relationship the different integral parts of his father's evil. Now, after the first joltings and blurrings of Alec's focus, this vindictive clarity took

settled place. He had never felt his vision so keen, his brain so active and sure. His friend Wilfred had often said to him: "You need intellectual quickening." Well, now he had it, this quickening. His old double confusing consciousness of his father was gone for good. Before, there had been a queer composite picture of the father's advertised self and his self as shown in daily act. The advertisement, displayed by Glaive himself, by the aunt, by Alec's step-mother, and in earlier days by the housekeeper and the boys' nurse, was of a man just and self-controlled, honourable and generous, kind and clever, a good man and a good father, entitled to respect and obedience by natural right. From as far back in childhood as either of the boys could remember, the association of these qualities with their father had been impressed: and the impression of his actual self had been working upon them for the same length of time. Now, all this advertisement was peeled quite away, the authentic and consistent man emerged unplastered, and Alec, seeing his father for the first time, for the first time realized that he was his father, and so for the first time he could really hate him.

The boy walked more rapidly, his hatred caught sick and cold at his belly. What right had his father had to cheat and hurt them like this—as he had cheated and hurt them when they were such kids, and didn't know, and couldn't do anything? If he had flogged them, that wouldn't have been so bad. Alec had been flogged, of course, at his public school; that only mattered for the time, all the other chaps

were swished too, no one thought anything of it. His father had never beaten either him or Mervyn. "That wouldn't have amused him!" He liked to be cleverer than that in making them cry. Alec very clearly remembered Mervyn's shame at being seen crying; Mervyn had been angry with him for having seen, he had taken him by the wrist and punched his arm, with tears in his own eyes. Well—nothing their father said could ever make either of them cry again, they had been hardened in that way. All the same, he had left his marks, and he was there. He still had power, he would always be doing something to somebody. The man's active malevolence flashed on Alec. What had he done to the Mater to make her clear out like that?

The Mater— It was very puzzling to think of her, because she seemed, somehow, to have become a new person. It had always been impressed upon Alec that he loved her very much. Certainly it was odd, the house without her. She had always been somebody whom you had to remember to greet, to say good morning and good night and good-bye to, and on whose account you were not to make too much noise. "Not very strong" they said of her. That too had been impressed on the boy—also the fact of her beauty, so much so that the word "beautiful" instantly associated itself with her. And he had realized, with definite pride, that she was much better to look at than the women of other households. It used to seem hard luck on other boys that they should have to have their kind of mothers. Alec remembered

how the Mater used to look, in the hall, on her way out for a motor-drive. She wore black furs. His mind strained out to her. Once when they were all at the theatre in London, she had said to him: "You do enjoy it, darling, don't you?" That memory stood out very clear, but nothing came of it; it hung suspended, without contact. The Mater was a "beautiful," "not very strong" person, closely connected with several things you had to remember, with her place at the dining-table, with being "in her room," where she had not uncommonly stayed, invisible to Alec and Mervyn, for days together. When she spoke she made you want to answer in the same kind of low voice. Alec's acceptance of her had been of that completely incurious and passive kind given by young people to the elders who live with them. Yet for all this, and for all the little he had seen or thought of her, she was involved, deeply, in his idea of "home": he always felt she was there. Now she was not, and the readjustments, the challenges clamouring out of that fact were too much for the boy. He stopped his ears to them: he recalled that remark of Mervyn's to keep them off.

Of course Mervyn was absolutely right. The Mater was well out of it, you couldn't blame her. Only, as Mervyn said, it was a pity that silly fool Williams had to be mixed up in it. Alec determined not to accept any condolences, direct or indirect. Father Collett would say something about it—so would Wilfred Vail—and he would tell them that he thought—that he knew his stepmother was right. There had

been enough lies: he wouldn't be like his father. But it wasn't only a question of his father; there were all these other people, the neighbours. They would lie too, they would all of them say the Mater had done wrong, they would say they were sorry for his father, they would support him.—Perhaps there hadn't been any special thing his father had done to her, it had been just his general beastliness, general "bloodiness," that she couldn't stand any longer. Before the rest of the family he had always behaved pretty decently to her, he wasn't rude as he was to Aunt Cathy, he didn't row her as her rowed the others. Alec understood, without worded thought, that his father's feeling for Mrs. Glaive as his personal property prevented him from compromising himself by that kind of attack upon her. He realized, too, that his father's perpetual air of superior forbearance with his wife might well be worse to put up with, day in and day out, than any ridicule or insult. And there had been certain galled raking tones sometimes carried to the boy's ears from the big bedroom. "What a stupid woman!" he had overheard once: a remark that had touched his memory strangely. For how could "the best mother, the best woman in the world," as his father had often assured them she was, be stupid? He knew that he had heard that remark before, said in just that way, in just that place; he thought he must have dreamed it, till gradually there came from very early childhood the remembrance of his father having exclaimed upon his real mother in the same phrase.

Alec's real mother was vague and distant, but he remembered one thing about her now, he remembered how she had once cried. She had been reading him a story of Hans Andersen, a story about Cupid, the little boy who had hit every father and mother with his arrow. "You can ask your mother if this is not true." Alec indignantly had asked. "Yes," she replied, and then turned her face and cried with a violence of misery that amazed the child and shocked him.

It never occurred to Alec that Mrs. Glaive might be "in love" with Carlyon-Williams, he could not imagine her "in love" with anybody: a romantic elopement was too incongruous with his household associations with his stepmother for him to take a moment's view of it. But he knew that what to himself he called "the smutty part of it" would be vivid to every one, and this shamed and annoyed him. He knew the kind of whispering slant-eyed interest that would be taken by people like Mr. McGill, the lay-reader—the "Purity Ghoul," as Mervyn called him, because of his bony sallow face and his activity in a certain organization that aimed at the promotion of virtuousness in "thought, word, and deed." He knew, too, that whenever anything "smutty" came in, people always laughed, and that in this case they would laugh chiefly at his father. It was some satisfaction that his father would mind being laughed at, it was paying him back. He had made his family a laughing-stock, now he'd be one himself—"us, too, I suppose, but I don't care!"

Alec's mind went to the adolescent abortive "love-affairs" of Mervyn and himself, to the peculiar acuteness and eagerness of his father's ridicule of them—an eagerness sharpened by jealousy, if the boy had known it. "How's our baby Romeo this morning?" Mervyn had raised his hand at that query, afterwards he told Alec that he had wanted to hit the old man hard: "God knows why I didn't: I wish I had. I will next time." But nothing came of that. . . . The curious thing was that the father seemed furtively proud of Mervyn's amours, just as he was of Mervyn's extravagances: "Young dog, I tell you, Resine—" Alec had overheard the sly comment to their doctor: "young dog, I caught him . . . better look out for him, Resine." And Dr. Resine had laughed, he had said something about "the green tree and the dry." People always laughed about things of this kind, they laughed or they were oddly excited, or, like Mr. McGill, they were earnestly disturbed.

He began wondering if Frippie Clark would be anywhere about that morning. He hadn't seen her since the half-term holiday—six or seven weeks ago. Mervyn thought him "a bit of a rotter" for having anything to do with the girl, Mervyn had changed in some ways since he got engaged to Nita Resine. Wilfred Vail disapproved, too: "I don't like it, Alec, your fooling about with these village 'mawthers.'" Alec had not answered, but his lips grew grim. He resented Wilfred's speaking of Frippie as though there were lots of other village girls just like her. She was quite different, she didn't

make him shy, he never felt himself blushing with her, she put him at ease, and she thought something of him. Other girls didn't tell him where they were going to pick blackberries or look for fossil-shells, and if they had, they wouldn't have been alone when he got there, they wouldn't have said, in that friendly way: "Well, give us a kiss, come on." He didn't care whether other people thought he ought to go seeing Frippie or not; he didn't care now. He wasn't going to trouble himself any more about whether it was right. People were wrong about the Mater's going away, and they were probably wrong about other things: they were wrong about this. He'd do as he pleased: he'd consult himself, not them. Byron had done as he pleased, and he was a great man. He'd tell Wilfred that. Again Alec swished at the gorse, and his lips tightened.

His father had said that he was to be careful how he behaved. That meant that his good behaviour would be a sort of protection to his father, like the neighbours' sympathy, like their opinions. Well, he wouldn't! If his father and the others didn't like it, so much the better.

CHAPTER III

ON arrival at Father Collett's, Alec found himself nervous. "Good morning," he said, without looking at the priest. "I didn't think it would turn out so fine, did you? The rain seems quite to have—to have—stopped altogether, you know."

"My dear Alec," said the Anglican Father. He held the boy's hand, and drew him towards a chair that had its back to the light.

"You heard at once, I suppose?"

"Servants are couriers."

"And I didn't know—all this time."

"My dear boy, I hope this won't affect your life—wrongly. It's that that matters, for us."

Alec did not answer nor look up. In reaction to the confusions and fermentations and exhaustions that the morning had dealt him, his mind lay back: lying in the wash of spent emotion, in the shallows left by his broken waves of anger and hate, he was relaxed, exposed. His strained will, recalcitrant and seeking respite, beckoned to the sensory pleasure of surrender to the priest's spiritual advances. He lay open to the indulgence of this so complete change of stroke and play upon his consciousness.

Father Collett stood away from the boy, looking down at him with his live black eyes. Cassock and

tonsure gave new values of force to his powerful build, to his swart breadth of face. After awhile he went to Alec, he put his hand on his shoulder.

"You feel this a great deal. You must use it. My dear Alec, don't let it warp you, don't let it tarnish you. You're at a dangerous age. You must master this, make it an instrument."

"My stepmother is absolutely in the right!" Alec's former emotions flickered suddenly.

"Our Lord would not say that."

Father Collett sat by the boy's side, and drew his chair to him. One of the things Alec had first liked him for was that he did not say "Our Lerd," like most other clergymen.

"But it is true," Collett went on, "that He would not judge as the world judges. He would not speak the world's language nor think the world's thoughts." Alec half-closed his eyes, luxuriously responsive to the familiar measured rhythm of the priest's voice. It was a richly charged voice, a voice of deep quiet flow. "But the world's errors drive us to errors. There is the danger for you now. What has happened should show you where the real division in life lies—the division between the life spiritual and the life material. I hope it will show you that. Your stepmother was caught and tangled, poor lady, in one worldly net: she has broken from that, but for what? The world will tangle her soul no less, now."

"Do you say she has done wrong, then?"

"Yes, in a sense. Because she has done a vain thing, a thing that can leave no posterity for her soul.

Waste and dispersion in effort, that is evil. That is what evil means."

"That's true, Father—I've felt that—" He looked up, the priest's eyes subdued him.

"You have felt it, my dear son, because you are ordained to the spiritual life." Father Collett's tone was possessingly earnest. "Because you are of us. It is a very right and a very profound instinct that urges you against condemnation of your stepmother. That condemnation would be waste of the energy that is given you for reaching up, for reaching on—"

"Of course I don't condemn her! I condemn him!"

"The man? This Mr.—"

"No, my father. I hate him." Alec was no longer lapped and lulled.

"Ah, yes." Father Collett paused. "I see. But condemning him will not help you, it will frustrate you. 'Judge not that ye be not—'"

"But I want to be judged! I want every one to be, and then we'd have it all cleared up! I want the Day of Judgment—" The boy was stirred to an unexpected resistance. "And Christ condemned," he added.

"We are not Christs. Christ knew that the only way to achieve the only end—that is, the goal of complete spiritual dedication—is to take all the currents of our energy and feeling—hatred and ambition and lust and love—and turn them to that one great current of the true life. How can your hatred of your father minister to you—?"

"I don't want it to minister to me. You don't know. You can't know how he's been—well, how he's been hurting us all, all these years, trying to make everybody look ridiculous and feel wretched. He's a bad man—bad—and he ought to be made to pay—he ought to be stopped! Do you mean to say *you* would go on just putting up with it?" Alec demanded passionately.

"If he only makes people wretched and ridiculous, that is nothing. If he can make them feel vindictive and destructive, that is a great deal. But he can't do that—nobody can do that. The responsibility for these feelings of yours lies with yourself, with no one else. The only way, dear Alec, that you can fight against evil is by not admitting evil past the gates of your own spirit. There is no way in which the world can know good except the way of individual spiritual effort. Each must seek the Kingdom of God for himself, must seek the salvation of his own soul. Then all else shall be added to him, and, at the last, to his brethren. What do you think you can do by hatred of your father, by rebellion against him, by 'punishing' him? Whatever evil there may be in him, you cannot conquer that: the conquest of that can only come from within—your hostility cannot help his soul—"

"Oh, I hadn't any idea of helping his soul!" Alec breathed hard.

"If he deserves punishment, God will punish him, in himself."

"I don't want God's way of punishing, I want mine!"

"Well, then!"

The priest stood up. He was a little flushed, his black eyes were restless. Alec's determination troubled him, and he could not decide how best to meet it. Leaning on the mantelpiece, he became conscious of his own physical bulk, conscious of the full and beating flow of his blood. His decision hurried to an arresting and turning of the boy by an exposure of himself, by personal humiliation, by the intimacy, by the thrill that would come of this.

"You know my mother was a Creole," he said. "And I've heard what they call me here. They call me 'the black bullock.'"

"Oh, they're stupid people, everything they say or think is wrong!"

Father Collett's colour deepened with pleasure at the boy's championship. "I know *you* think kindly of me, Alec. Why is that—why do you?" He was even faltering, and the wistfulness of his look was strange in its contrast with him.

"Oh, it's because you take me away from everything! That's what it is, it's something like dreams, the sort of dreams one likes, you know. I'm not in the same sort of time when I'm with you— It's all different—"

"You mean that I touch the past for you?" Collett was eager and pleased.

"Yes. I don't know—I can't talk about it, but I do feel it.—I dreamt I was in some woods with you,

and was living with you, only you weren't a priest—and we wore things that you see in old pictures—green—sort of mediaeval dress. I had a different name—Dexter Foothood—extraordinary sort of name. When I woke up, I wrote it down, or I should have forgotten it. There was a church, and we went in. They were burying somebody under the stone floor: everything was Sarum use—and, it was absurd, but I was the person they were burying, in a way. You know how mixed up things are in dreams!”

“Yes. Yes!” The priest was listening with intent pleasure.

“Oh, that's all.” Alec shut up, embarrassed.

“They were burying you.” The fire burnt slow in the man's eyes, and his voice had the grave measure of a ritual. “And yet you lived: and you lived the more. That is what God means by you, and by me. Alec! do you think that I haven't died—and been buried—lost my life to save it? That is the one thing needful, that we, after the Pattern of our Saviour, should die that we may rise again. Life everlasting can be won only by the willing and conscious renunciation of the life of the flesh. It is hard, this renunciation, but how much harder it was for me than for you!”

He sat down again by Alec, and the veins of the boy's senses grew slowly charged by him. Again Alec was beckoned to an easing surrender, a surrender of subtle thrill and delicate allure. His spent emotion and his physical hunger, in sweet intrigue, exposed him. He felt a little faint, and that faintness

indulged him luxuriously. The strong-bodied priest could not know this. Alec was conscious of the privacy of his feeling, he was thus farther indulged. The priest was a vice to him.

"You don't know, dear boy, with what gross beasts I had to fight. You never can know, because God has given you a nature of far greater refinement than mine. But I did overcome—God forbid that I should glory—" He made the sign of the cross. "It is in Christ that I glory when I tell you of this. You are nineteen now. When I was nineteen I was capable of any sin, of any degradation. I was *guilty* of sin, I *was* degraded. And now, even though I have conquered in Christ—the mark of the dead beast is in my face, and will be till I die. Sometimes, Alec, I look horrible—horrible—"

The boy pleurably trembled. "You never would, to me," he said, "never—"

"Ah, Alec! Your friendship is my very great reward. These temporary rewards are allowed us weaker ones: they are an earnest, a pledge to comfort faith—a symbol. I could never have been your friend if I had not beaten down the evil in me. I am forty-three years old. What should I have been like, now, after twenty-six years, if that evil had beaten me down? You would have shrunk from me—Alec—"

"I can't imagine you any different, Father." Alec enjoyed the slight caress that he gave to his tone.

"Ah, I *can*. You don't know, you can't know. But the enemies of your soul may be more dangerous to you than mine were, more subtle, because they are

less brutish. Spiritual pride is often harder to overcome than carnal lust. You are not carnal, Alec, but you have flames that might consume you. You have fierce energies, hostile energies, energies that would destroy you in seeking to destroy others. You could be proud enough to dare to usurp the Judgment Seat of God!" Alec looked away, rather embarrassed, but tremendously flattered. "These enemies of your spirit have covered-up faces, mine showed theirs clear, unmasked. That is why I warn you now, because you have craft against you; I only had force that could be met with force.—Oh, my dear boy, this is the truth, the truth that Christ came for. We must conquer, we must sacrifice everything that stands between us and our fulfilment—*all* passions that are of this world. Pride and hatred must be set underfoot no less than lust—and so must all worldly action, all desires that bind the soul to the world's wheels. This is Christ's teaching, and the proof of its eternal truth is that no human being can follow it utterly, and that not one in a million can follow it at all!"

The priest was speaking more rapidly, more strongly. He clasped his hands and looked before him, sitting erect.

"Christ commands all our forces. The force that would make a man a great leader in the world, a great captain, a great statesman, a great poet or painter or musician—whatever is the force-in-chief of a man's spirit, that must be taken and turned and used wholly to bear the soul on toward its consum-

mation! These men of action—men of worldly note—men of great careers—what shall it profit them? What of the soul that is theirs and God's? To abide in the sphere of one's own soul." He whispered in a passion of reverence. "It is a hard saying, but it is Christ's: 'How hardly shall they that have riches—!' He means riches of all kinds, not wealth in money only—all qualities and energies that are of worldly use. Martha's humble household helpfulness—even that—stayed the freedom of her spiritual movement. It is not only the money-changers who defile the Temple—"

"But—I couldn't give myself up like that! I never could."

"It would be realizing the only living self that you have. You *can* do it, Alec. You could be a priest—a true priest. I am utterly sure of it—if you will—"

"You want me to leave all this—this wrong that my father has done?" Alec spoke under the sharp tremor of revived feeling. "You want me to leave all that, and all those other horrible disgusting things! People aren't right in what they do and say about what they call 'immorality,' they don't understand. I must try—I must say what I think. It's my father who's wicked and evil, not my stepmother. Why should she have kept on with him, how would that have helped her, spiritually or anyhow else? It would have been just the opposite. I can't see how it can be right just to clear out and think of what you can do for your soul!"

"It is right: growth of one soul leads on the growth of others. You would only poison yourself by this rebellion and revenge and hate, and you would cure nothing, help no one. It is perfectly true that the world condemns sins of the flesh in utter blindness. Reject the world's morality—yes: but your rejection must strengthen your acceptance of the morality of Christ. Why is carnal indulgence wrong? Not because of any evil material or physical effects it may have—often no such effects come from it. But if they invariably came—if family life or the social system—the property idea—were invariably hurt by what is called unlawful lust, or if the body's health were invariably hurt—all this would be a matter of no moment. Christ cared nothing for bodily health, He cared less for family life and the human orderings of His day; He was even against them, He knew and denounced their obstructiveness. No. Carnal indulgence is wrong and Christ rejected it because it draws off to the lower life, the temporary life, all the fervour, the force, and the quickening that God wills for the higher life, the life eternal. It is a misapplication of what would lead you to God. This is why the greatest sinners are so near akin to the greatest saints. Between them there is only the difference of choice of direction—Saint Augustine—the Magdalene—"

"But then—" Alec's gaze was fixed, he hesitated and stammered, while the priest noticed the pallor that heightened his dark eyes. "Then how about

marriage? How is there any difference? I mean in that way—for—”

He faltered and closed his eyes against the vertigo that swayed him; there was motion of blackness. . . . Father Collett took both his hands. “Alec! You’re faint—my boy—I should have seen.” He got up and went hurriedly over to the bell.

“Oh, it’s all right. I didn’t have breakfast. It’s nothing—stupid of me.”

Alec found himself pleasurably engaged with this unaccustomed physical faintness, he allied himself with it, he enjoyed being put, in this vagueness, at the mercy of what might come. It gave him a new importance. “This is why people fast,” he thought, and he recalled a contemptuous observation of his father’s about religious visionaries: “If you eat too much, you dream by night; if you eat too little, you dream by day.”

“You must take some wine and food; you shall have it at once.”

Again the priest’s fleshiness weighted him as he looked down at the boy’s face, with its delicacy of youth, its lightly turned contours, all its fleeting impressionable lines. The lips were now loosely set, the mouth looked larger, it looked unguarded. The “black bullock’s” eyes softened with tenderness and admiration. This boy must not be wasted in the world—coarsened by the world. This must be the hour of his spiritual weaning—the very hour. The priest’s whole frame went throbbing to win this boy for religion, to win him for the true religious life that was

so rare now, the life that God, in His wisdom, had allowed those who called themselves Christians almost to forget. Ah, if he could win Alec, how his very soul would go out to Christ, in blessed fulfilment. "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace—for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." He trembled with his spiritual passion, he drew force and shaking ecstasy for this passion from his bodily strength. "My beloved son," he thought, looking at the boy—and the phrase smote him with sweet violence out of its association with Christ. It was frightening and wonderful to think it of Alec, with the Crucifix in view. Ah, he would take him by the hand, away from the secular strife, from vain discordance, from worldly evil, from the soilures of women, and before the Eternal Altar might he not greatly triumph with him under the Will of God? "This is my beloved son—my beloved—in whom Thou art well pleased. I have brought him—saved him!" The spiritual egoist vibrated with his essential thrill.

CHAPTER IV

FATHER COLLETT chose for Alec what he judged to be the most fortifying of the few wines he had—a Nuits of matured virtue. The boy sipped from the green bowl of the glass; with the long spirally twisted stem slim to his fingers, he responded to the instant working of the wine upon his blood. In his cheeks he felt a luxurious and gradual flicker, there was a light wavy motion of colour in his brain: the refreshment in languor was exquisite.

He took luncheon with the priest, and it seemed that no food had ever tasted more delicious than the anchovies and the crisp fried sole of that meal. The Nuits was by the side of his plate, and he filled a second glass, happily surprised by the variation of the wine's flavour to harmony with the taste of the fish. His father was out of his mind.

"This must be a fine claret." He wanted the prestige of a connoisseur.

"Comparatively, perhaps." Father Collett did not correct the boy's mistake. He looked at him, noting his flush. "It wouldn't be wise, though—forgive me, Alec, but after you have been feeling faint—I shouldn't take *more* than two glasses." He poured his own wine—a white Bordeaux—from its glass, and filled up the tumbler with soda-water.

"Some people think it's wrong to drink at all,"

said Alec musingly. "There are so many different things that people think wrong. They can't all be right—I mean about all these things. How is one to know?"

"Our Lord knew what was good and what was evil. We have His guidance. He turned water into wine, and wine into His own blood. If wine were evil, He would not have chosen it to express the most tremendous mystery of His Faith. Surely that is clear—"

"It doesn't seem clear to all these Baptists and Methodists and Wesleyans—"

"My dear boy, their stupid virulence against wine is only one of their many stupid and unpleasant heresies. Wine is eschewed by heretics and Mahometans. They hardly concern us." The priest spoke lightly, almost humorously, as he poured a little more Bordeaux into his glass. "Harry—" he addressed his boy servant, who came in at that moment, "tell Eugene to cook us something more. We were late getting to lunch today," he added to Alec, enjoying using an expression that suggested their living together. He had seen that the fish hardly met the boy's appetite half-way.

"It's much nicer not being waited on by maids," said Alec as the door closed. He felt remarkably happy, remarkably well placed; and disposed to a light haphazard ranging along the topics of easy moments.

"The war constrained me to a parlourmaid—for one week. She breathed down my neck, and the terrible

memory of that made it impossible for me to write my sermons. For some time I used to wait on myself—you remember?—and I did it very badly, but happily it is a physical impossibility to breathe down one's own neck, and even if it were not, the torment would be more tolerable, self-inflicted."

Alec filled his glass again with the Burgundy. Father Collett shook his head at him.

"A shocking scene," he remarked. "A warning, an awful warning. Some one should really have it done as an oleograph for decoration of the very veriest of Free Church homes. 'The proselytizing priest—plying his victim with strong drink.'—'Weakening the Will: or the First Step to Rome.' It would look well on one of those Protestant Calendars. 'Reeling Romeward'—perhaps that is neater. What will happen to me, Alec, if Mr. Edgar Carrick—the Reverend Carrick,' I should say—should chance to pass by when you totter wine-stained from my gate? No, no, that must never be!" he cried, laying his hand for an instant on the bottle.

"All right. I won't take any more."

Cutlets were brought, with green peas; the boy ate heartily, Father Collett took only a few mouthfuls. He kept his bantering tone, playing on with his priestly-holiday raillery, his churchy frivolity that showed such sad decay from the old-time mirth of refectory and cloister. On Father Collett this "humour" had been artificially imposed by his associations. Alec accepted it uncritically as something that had to do with the priest—like his clothes;

not really important. He lazily remembered that Mervyn didn't like Father Collett's jokes. "When he tries to be funny he simply sets my teeth on edge. I think he's awful." Alec didn't mind. Dr. Resine's jokes were what he couldn't stand, because he didn't like Dr. Resine. He looked up at Father Collett and liked very much the look of fondness for him in the sloe-black eyes: and there was a gratifying confirmation of the priest's friendly individuality in those joined soft dense eyebrows, unlike the eyebrows of any one else, for one was glossy-black, the other white as milk, with the bridging hair of an intermediate grey. This physical peculiarity seemed in some way co-operative with affection.

Alec, in being fed, and fed so well—his father's cook was no expert—grew sportive, he wanted to tease, knowing the priest was fond of him; he wanted to make him do something that would be rather agitating to him, wanted to stir conflict between the promptings of good judgment and the promptings of fondness. His instinct was like that of a woman who counterbalances and overcomes the strength of her man by her advantage in his being a good deal more committed to his affection than she to hers. Alec cast about for some caprice, some whim that would trouble his companion a little, move him to a troubled resistance, divide his will: it was the flattery of this sport that he wanted, and then the flattery of the priest's yielding to him, as he knew he would. He must feel his power, this way.

"I wish I knew more about wine," he said sud-

denly. "I mean what wines go with what food. You take the stronger wines and liqueurs after eating, don't you?"

"You don't. At least not when you're lunching with me." Father Collett looked "comically severe."

"Oh, I meant people generally—of course. I know you never drink champagne with fish."

"No, that would be cruelty to the fish. Unless they're crustaceans, they resent it extremely. And they spoil the champagne, in revenge."

"I remember my father laughing at the Markby-Levins because they served champagne with turbot at one of their dinners. He said it showed what kind of people they were."

"Ah. In that case the turbot was avenged by impugning the gentility of his tormentors."

"Brandy's the same kind of thing as champagne, isn't it? Made of the same grapes, I mean?"

"Unless we chance to be deceived, Alec."

"Well, I suppose you wouldn't drink brandy with fish, would you? But you could afterwards, with coffee?"

"It would be possible. Without forfeiting all claim to good breeding." The priest sipped from his coffee cup, and then remarked: "Will you take *sugar* with yours?"

"I have sugar, thanks."

"And I won't offer you milk or cream, I won't countenance that atrocious Anglo-Saxon barbarism. So—well—" Father Collett was evidently a little uneasy.

"Oh, I suppose you've given it all away to the sick parishioners!"

"'It'? What is 'it'?—My dear boy, old Mrs. Mudd must have finished my last bottle—drained it to the dregs—every drop. Poor soul, it made her so happy, I hadn't the heart to stop her. 'That du hully fare good in the innards,' she said. You see I haven't learnt to talk Suffolk yet, and I doubt if I ever shall! I'm no linguist."

"Just a liqueur glass wouldn't hurt, would it, Father?" Alec looked at him with eyes that faintly smiled his confident mischief. "I didn't take another glass of the wine," he added, with a rather touchy plaintiveness.

"But, my dear innocent child, don't you know that brandy is much stronger than Nuits—?"

"Yes, but the glass is ever so much smaller—ever so much smaller."

The iteration of the phrase harmonized peculiarly with the mood that the rich wine and plentiful meal had brought him—a mood that lent the boy a sense of command at leisure, a sense of being able to afford to wait in this unusual blurred relaxation, to wait and to win. If he could always have a little wine, he thought, he would never be embarrassed. Nothing could make him blush now.

"Really, Alec—" Father Collett spoke after a pause, and his tone was seriously touched. "I would rather you didn't have the brandy. Of course I'm your host—I—"

"Oh, don't give it to me because you're my host!

As if I thought of you as a *host!*” He spoke with shy affection.

The priest was moved. “You’re a young rogue, I’m afraid,” he murmured. His eyes moistened, and Alec knew that he would give in. He waited, not drinking his coffee. “But I don’t want to give you brandy, I don’t think I ought to—now, do *you?*”

“Well, of course if you think I’m a baby!”

Father Collett rose, rueful. His emotions were much more entangled than the boy could imagine. He was resentful, a little, of the forcing of his will, but it was much more important to him that he was under temptation, that he was most self-reproachfully and wrestlingly conscious of the secular, all too secular pleasure that hedonists feel in giving attractive young people more than enough to drink. As he went to the sideboard he prayed for strength of resistance.

“Is that *the* brandy?”

“What do you mean, Alec?”

“‘Cognac,’ it says on the label.”

“Well, cognac is brandy. The kind you take with coffee.”

“Yes, but—oh, I say, Father, couldn’t you give me some of the kind you gave Mervyn? You know, that time he was caught in the storm and got wet through. He said it was the finest stuff he’d ever tasted. Just one glass—one of those little glasses—you really might—it wouldn’t matter for once—” He pleaded charmingly, and Father Collett was disturbingly open to the charm.

“You’ll make a Methodist of me, if you go on.”

He wavered, while Alec luxuriated in his tyranny that was so favoured, so secure.

"It's really too bad of you, Alec—and my niece Gillian is dining with me tonight, too."

"Whatever has that got to do with it?" Alec laughed.

"Oh, you wouldn't ask if you knew her, you wouldn't indeed. She's—well, she's an extremely agitating person—"

"Is the real brandy in the sideboard, too, or do you keep it in the cellar?"

"Here! It's here!" Collett spoke sharply and excitedly, with a quick shrug. "All right, I give up." He turned in his chair and took out a different bottle. "My niece, you see—" Again he hesitated, then filled a liqueur glass for Alec and pushed it to him.

The boy took it, watching, not drinking at once. "You never told me you had a niece?"

"Oh, Gillian is a very dark secret. Besides, it's only quite lately that she's been about here at all—and you were at school."

"Why is she—agitating?"

"Oh, she talks about things that don't concern me, the sort of things I have no opinion on. You see, Alec, when I decided to become a priest I decided at the same time to keep clear, altogether, of all the disputes of our times. Even religious disputes. I am no controversialist." He spoke with a shade of contempt. "We shouldn't be seduced by cleverness. We should tame it!"

"She's clever, then, is she?"

"Oh, Gillian lives in disputation, she lives in nothing else. We don't speak one another's language, it's very trying. She's a disciple of freedom for her sex—a preacher of it. Heaven knows what more freedom they want. They got the vote, I'd hoped that would keep them quiet—"

"Where is she staying?" Alec had forgotten his brandy.

"Oh, let me see—"

"Why surely you *know*?"

"Oh, yes, of course—just for the moment I—" The priest was disconcerted. He wished he had not mentioned Gillian in that moment when he was reaching out for some topic to divert the boy.—Still, Gillian was not so very young, she was twenty-six. He must represent her as a blue-stocking. "She's staying with the Burkes." He had to answer Alec's expectant look. "She knows them in London. Miss Burke is coming to dinner with her, and I'm sure I hope she'll keep her in order. I shan't be able to—not after your bad behaviour!"

Alec was reminded, and drank. "The coffee's cold," he said mischievously, "I won't waste it on that." Unversed though he was, he could respond to that crispness and sharpness of old brandy, to that hint it gives of the dry curl-back and crackle of champagne, while holding off in finer reserve from the welcoming palate.

"What a ripping brandy! It's worth behaving badly to get it.—Would your niece think my step-

mother was right? Is her name the same as yours?"

"Gillian Collett would think anything right that most other people think wrong. I often tell her that she's wonderfully simple—"

"I'd like to meet her! Here's her good health!"

"My dear boy,"—the priest rose hurriedly—"do you know it's nearly three o'clock?"

"Is it? And I ought to have been home at twelve for the gov'nor's pi. jaw— Oh, sorry!"

"Why?" Father Collett opened the door. "Because your name for a moral talk throws ridicule on part of the stock-in-trade of my profession? Well!" He laughed and went on into the study.

The boy's sense of well-being flowered richly. It seemed so good, all this: the well-appointed orderly little house, the religious pictures of subdued colour, the shelves with their peaceful weight of books, the French windows opening out to the amiable warmth that the afternoon had brought, the quiet smooth green lawn that lay beyond—and all these pleasant things were so wonderfully ripened and secured by the good food, the good drink, by the lingering dining-room impression of white linen and bright silver, cut glass and flowers and china. . . .

"I want to talk to you, you know, Alec."

"Oh . . . yes." Alec took a cigarette from a gold and blue box, stamped with the arms of Siena, and the priest lighted it for him gravely. "What kind of a girl is your niece, Father? You don't mind my asking?"

"Oh, haven't I given you an idea of her?" The priest's face clouded.

"Yes—but I mean—well, in herself, you know. What exactly does she do? Does she do anything?"

"My dear boy, she's always doing everything! She edits a paper called *The Woman's Republic* that nothing would induce me to read. She used to work in one of those Government Offices in London. She writes articles, she speaks in public. She's been doing that kind of thing for nearly ten years." His emphasis of the period of time was almost feminine.

"Oh.—But why don't you tell me what she's like?" Alec insisted, partly out of curiosity, partly from a wish to tease the priest's reluctance.

"I can't describe people. She's dark—she's about the usual height, I suppose—she's—oh, really, Alec, I don't know! She looks younger than she is, I think."

"Well, she couldn't be so awfully old, being your niece."

"My elder brother's daughter. He married young.—My dear boy, don't you want to talk to me about yourself? Isn't there anything—?"

Alec shook his head and looked down. He felt ashamed, because the conversation about Gillian Collett had suggested the girl Frippie to his mind, in a way not congruous with the priest's spiritual philosophy.

Father Collett was silent. He took a cigarette, turned it over and scrutinized it, as though it were some rare insect or moth. "Alec," he said at last,

"there was a boy came to me this morning, just before you were here. He had wronged a young girl, and he came to ask me if he should marry her. He said he would if I told him to. She will have a child very soon."

"Who is she? Do I know her?"

"Oh, one of the village girls. I advised him—strongly—not to marry her. Because I know that the marriage would spoil his life. She's a light girl, they're utterly unsuited; and it was all much more her fault than his. I very much doubt if he's the only one." He gave Alec a close sudden look. "Surely I was right. Christ's bidding was to give up wives for His sake, not to take them."

"Yes, imagine, how ridiculous, if he'd told Mary Magdalene to take a husband!"

"Of all her sins that might have been the worst."

"Would you say that in a sermon?" Alec was excited by the thought.

"It might have led her the furthest from God."

"Yes, but who is this girl?"

"Yes, I did right. I think I did right. But it would have been altogether impossible for me to have done differently. Altogether.—Oh, if I could bring to you—if only I could, Alec—the feeling of chastity in youth as a beautiful thing—in itself. If I could give you the sense of the romance and fervour—the fervent mysteries of abstinence, of renunciation!" His black eyes flashed.

"Yes, but— Look here, then how about married people? I was going to ask you. Marrying can't

be right, can it? If a man's a rip, he can clear out of it, so can a woman, just like Mary Magdalene. They can get away and be spiritual—but a husband can't, and a wife can't, unless she's got some other man to take her away, like the Mater, and you say that's just as bad. I say, Father, why don't you preach all these things you tell me, say it in church, I mean, next Sunday? That'd make them sit up! Say what you said just now about Mary Magdalene—won't you?"

"Oh, Alec! No. To say that in a sermon. It would turn to poison in people's minds. It would be a stumbling-block to the simple. It might destroy what influence I have." Father Collett's face twitched. "I can't attack marriage." He spoke feebly, unlike himself: Alec's suggestion had alarmed him. "And I'm unmarried. Oh, it would sound absurd, they'd—"

"Well, you couldn't say it, could you, Father, if you had a wife! And tell them all about how running after girls and being a bad lot that way isn't nearly so bad as the things these people do who think they're quite 'pi.' Do tell them the real reason why going with girls is wrong, and that the bigger rip a chap is the better chance he has of being religious. That was jolly fine, I thought; it was quite different to what people get up and say in church. But the part about marriage, that's the most important. Oh, you *must!*"

"I shouldn't be understood. I should be accused of morbidity and pruriency and all sorts of things. You see, Alec—"

"You will preach that sermon, Father?" Alec was spurred by the excitement of a rising sense of power: he could compel the priest, he felt. "Yes? To please me?"

Collett looked at him, and then looked away at once. He trembled. His celibacy and religious devotion had impaired the natural virility of his affections, had made him subject to the kind of sexless fever that young girls have for one another. "I'll preach it," he said.

Alec rose, delighted. "It'll be one for the guv'nor!" he cried. He put his hand on the priest's. Collett drew back. "Next Sunday?" the boy asked.

"Yes, next Sunday."

"It doesn't make you—really unhappy?"

"You don't care if it does."

"Of course I care!" Alec reacted from his triumph, but was the more stubborn for his reaction. "I'll get the guv'nor to go," he said. "He'll see—"

"You know, Alec, that boy asked me if he could say how I had advised him. Of course I told him yes. Well, it is all over the village and beyond by now. They'll all connect whatever I say on Sunday—"

"Yes, and they'll connect it with my stepmother too, won't they?"

"I suppose so."

"Coming from you, it will be splendid! It'll show them!"

"Well, I've given you my word."

"I must get back. I mustn't miss tea as well as

lunch and the guv'nor's pi.-jaw. I wonder what he said. I know the kind of thing, all of it rot. It's only because he's hit that he minds. Good-bye, and thanks awfully."

"I was saying—you remember—that I couldn't have acted differently in that matter. . . . That boy. . . . Because I was once exactly in his case, and I did not marry."

"What, *you?*" Alec stopped short, he did not look at the priest, it seemed improper to look at him.

"I was younger than you at the time. I was just seventeen." He forced himself to look at Alec. "And the girl was not of another class. So naturally pressure was brought on me. But I would not give in—and I know I was right. I'm more sure of it now than I was then. Jealousies and hates would have taken the place of carnal love—a life-long barrier for the soul—"

"Yes, it would be extraordinary for you to be married."

"It would have changed my whole life—not for good! I couldn't have told the boy to—"

Alec's lips were tight set. "It's unfair!" was his mastering thought. Father Collett wanted him to resist his temptations, wanted him to keep away from girls—and all the while he had had his time of that when he was Alec's age—when he was two years younger! The boy felt that he had been cheated out of two years. He was jealous and resentful. He was nineteen and he had never— What would it

be like, then, this thing that every one, Father Collett as well as the others, made out to be so awfully important? He made up his mind that he would know, that he wouldn't be kept out any longer. Father Collett had been only seventeen.

"Were you—" He hesitated, and his tone was strained, unnaturally dry. "Were you tremendously in love with her and all that? She must have been awfully fond of you."

"Of course we were a very strong temptation to one another." The priest ran his fingers in tight pressure along his forehead. "Don't ask me about it, Alec."

"He had that," Alec thought. "He had all that." His imagination leaped burningly. "Well, good-bye," he said.

"Tell me." Collett was conscious of the warm tremor of the boy's hand. "You will let me ask. You are still—untouched, aren't you? You would tell me if— You haven't, ever—?"

"No, I haven't!"

"Thank God! I had even thought—forgive me for it—that you might be the father—"

"The father! What of?"

"My dear boy! What a relief to me to be sure—to know that you're still—"

"Yes, I am!" Alec amazed the other by the vivid pique of his tone. "But—" He hesitated, breathing hard, then: "But I *won't* be, though!" He let the priest have it, revenging his pique by the cruelty of the stroke.

Collett looked at him with sorrow so deep in his eyes that Alec felt shamed and regretful, felt that he had been a brute to say that. "One feels differently at different times, you know," he stammered.

"Alec! Is it because I told you, because you know that I—? I shouldn't have told. I was wrong." His mouth quivered.

"Oh, no, it wasn't *that!*" The true conjecture touched Alec's pride.

"You know what great grief I should feel if you stumbled because of me. You know the feeling I have for you, Alec." He put out his hand, and Alec, unconsciously, out of his impatience to be off, moved from him. "Forgive me." Collett's eyes looked hurt. "My dear Alec—"

He left him, and went through into the little room opening out from his study, a bare room where he prayed and sometimes wrote his sermons. This sermon must be written at once. He took a sheet of paper and wrote out three texts slowly and carefully:

There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the Kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting.

If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

The publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you.

"Hate his father." The priest knew that he had done nothing to quell in Alec that other, that secular and self-destructive hate. He had indeed consented to gratify it by this sermon. He had had to consent. "If he had told me to speak of my sin—to confess that from the pulpit—I think I would do that too, if he told me." Collett rejoiced, fiercely and bitterly, in his sense of that subordination, of that sacrifice that he would be willing for. Then the strange violent joy that he had was darkened and overpowered by sense of guilt; guilt towards himself and guilt towards the boy who could so move him. . . . The fangs of doubt, as never before so strongly, assailed him: a terrible vision unfolded of the world as it had been since Christ. What if Christ's death had brought only a strengthening of the bonds of the world's folly, the world's brutality? What if the last horrid wail of disillusion and disbelief, three thousand years after the Crucifixion, should go up to an empty place? Ah, how far more dreadful and final, *that*, than the "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Could that cry have been torn from Jesus by a prophetic vision of the end of the human soul? The priest tried to assure himself that the centuries since the Crucifixion were only a moment in God's sight, that our minds could not reason from them. . . .

He bent his head, failing. In Flanders these terrors had not come to him. He realized that the hap-

piest and serenest time of his life had been then, amid bursting shells and bombs, amid mortal danger and mortal pain. What weakness, what cowardice, he thought, to stand in need of such help—outward, accidental.

He reverted to Alec. "I cannot lead him to Life, I am too fond of him. I am not stronger than my affection for him. That makes me an imperfect instrument." Perhaps he might even be an instrument of evil for the boy. Why had he spoken of Gillian? Alec was interested now in Gillian, and Gillian might—Gillian would do as she wished, and she was clever. Attractive, in her way, and no one could say that twenty-six was very old. Very often boys— And the beginning of it would have been that he, the priest, had named her and talked of her. Grief and jealousy went through him, and in bitterer flow because of Alec's defiant declaration at parting. "My sin will make his sin," he thought. "God forbids me to win him to grace: He turns me to his hurt for my punishment." "The Life will lose him: I shall lose him."—"Even here Thy hand shall lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me," he murmured, in an agonized effort of faith.

CHAPTER V

ALEC left the priest's house with an eager swing. He felt free. "Just fancy being always in black clothes," he thought, "and doing the same sort of things all your life. I suppose it's all right for him, though." What an extraordinary thing that the old chap should have gone on the racket like that. He hadn't been afraid of Alec's splitting on him about it; that was decent of him.

A little way along the road he passed a young woman who had been in service with the Glaives just before her recent marriage. "Good arternoon, Mr. Alec," she said, and smiled, with a look of that understanding, rather secretive admiration that young married women have for an attractive man. She noticed how well Alec's Panama hat suited him, with its heightening of the agreeable freshness of his complexion.

"Oh, Elsie, how are you?" The boy was conscious of her look, conscious of it as more guarded and yet bolder than the look he would have had from a maid. "Where are you going?"

He wanted to talk to her, he felt the piquancy of her being so lately married. She was different, a little; he did not know how.—"Oh, yes, I see—" He had not heard her answer, it suddenly embarrassed him, being with her, the two of them together in the

open road. He smiled rather awkwardly, raised his hand and passed on, sorry to leave her.

"But I want Frippie," he thought. "She's the girl for me!" He must find her now. Where would she be? Somewhere near her cottage, probably—on his way home. Suppose she wasn't about? He might turn back and catch up with Elsie: he didn't like doing that, but still— After all, Elsie knew about him and Frippie, he'd been afraid she might say something, but she hadn't, she was a good sort of girl—not one of the spiteful sort who sneaked and made trouble. He turned and caught up with her.

"I say—you might tell me, Elsie. Is Frippie Clark up at the cottage, do you know?"

"I don't know narthin' about her, nor don't *want*!"

"Why—what do you mean, Elsie?" Alec was surprised by the stubborn vindictiveness of the girl's tone.

"Oh, narthin'." Elsie modified her expression more becomingly, recovering her sense of the boy's presence. "She's gaddin' round somewhere. What her pore father don't hev to put up with from her!"

"She wouldn't be at the cottage, then?"

"Yu don' want narthin' to du with her, Mr. Alec—"

"Oh, I only happened to want to see her for a moment—"

"She's gone ridin' that there owd bisticle what young Tom Stevens give her. She's gone to Malstowe—makin' a sight of herself!"

"I don't see why it's making a sight of herself

to ride a bicycle into Malstowe." Alec continued to be puzzled by Elsie's antagonism.

The young woman looked up at him with a knowing furtiveness. He had the impression that her stubbornness and resentment covered something pleasing to her, something protective. "Well, I'd best be gettin' along, Mr. Alec," she said, as he stood silent, without giving her any sort of sex-glance.

Alec walked away, intent on cutting across the road to Malstowe at the next turning. What a good thing he had met Elsie! Elsie's disparagement and reluctance aided the priest's wine in spurring his wish for Frippie. Girls were funny about girls.—The road was dusty, he would have liked a lemon-squash. He wondered if he would have been more or less thirsty if he had had more to drink. He hadn't had enough: he could have wished more courage yet for the meeting with Frippie. Why was it that, for all her release of him from his natural shyness, he never had been able to come really freely to her? Why, after leaving her, had he always felt a fool? It hadn't been her fault, it had been his: some damned thing or other, inside him, had always kept him back. When he was alone, he thought of all sorts of things he could have done, and would do: yet when he was with her, it seemed quite different, he was held off. Silly fool he was—rotten silly fool—there was no reason—other chaps would have had a really good time. Not having seen her for so long would make it harder now, of course. If only he could feel as he'd felt just after lunch! Everything seemed so easy

then. By the time he met Frippie—if he did meet her—he supposed he'd be just the same as ever. But he wouldn't! He'd force himself against that, *now*. And his father wanted him to be careful; well, he'd show him, he'd score off him in that way too. If he got to know, all the better.

His father was somehow all twisted up with this, he always had been. There were vivid memories from years ago: one memory in particular—the first—of a little girl called Kathleen who had torn her dress in sliding down the bannisters. She would have fallen and hurt herself, only Alec had caught her; and when she was in his arms, laughing and flushed, and with her torn dress, he wanted to keep her there. He gave her a kiss, not meaning to. Then his father came, he looked in a funny way, said angrily: “Kathleen, how did your dress get torn?” and told Alec to go to his room, where he kept him shut up as a punishment. “We must nip this kind of thing in the bud,” he had said. The boy had asked him: “Why do you shut me up in the room because Kathleen tore her dress?” The garment became hugely important and mysterious, he had thought about it perpetually. “I must punish you for your sake, because I love you,” his father had told him, and Alec had been in utter amazement at the lie.

After that, the enmity of his father to him in this special relation became established. Once, driven by the baffling growth in strength, by the more and more disturbing determination and constancy of those on-comings so inexplicable and uninvited—once he had

begun to tell his father, to ask him: but the pouncing look in that tawny eye had put him forthwith into an unshakeable silent sullenness, a sullenness and silence which had held well. He was the more puzzled and troubled, the more resentful of his father. "Was it wrong—and why? And how unfair if it was!" For the first time in his life he was pathetic.

Then there had been a time—what a little brute he must have been, he reflected—when he used to beat trees and things with sticks, and imagine they were people.—It was all the same sort of thing as before, only in a different way, rather. That American book with descriptions of negroes and negresses being whipped—he had enjoyed those descriptions. Everything else used to seem dull. . . . Then the Fox's Book of Martyrs, in his father's study: how exciting that had been, much more exciting than the books he was forbidden to read. He had told Father Collett, thinking that it must mean some dreadful unmatched wickedness in him; he had been apprehensive and thrilled. But the priest had said that it was all perfectly natural and perfectly usual, but that things that were natural and usual were often wrong; if he thought of making people happy instead of making them suffer, he would enjoy it just as much and be a better boy. Alec was half convinced then that he was like every one else, but he could not quite bring himself to believe that every one could feel so passionately wicked. Still, Father Collett had dulled the edges of his indulgence: even the penance for sin that he had set himself—getting out of his warm

bed in the cold and kneeling at the other end of the room in his nightgown while he said the Creed slowly—even this seemed to have less distinguished a point. A little later the powers of life rose up against him more formidably caparisoned—strong thrusting beasts, with colours of bright-gold frenzy and dull-red shame. He had said nothing then to Father Collett—and, by Jove, he was glad of that now. Now, of course, he understood, just as most people did. Mervyn wasn't worried, why should he be? It didn't really matter much, most chaps knew that: but all the same it didn't seem fair that he should have had to have that sort of a time of it when he was such a kid. If that was Nature she was an old—She was as bad as his father, because his father had been unfair and cruel to him in the same kind of way when he was too young to look out for himself. He would tackle this thing and his father—he'd tackle them both in the same way, he'd get even by defying and revenging and not caring a damn. Yes, he'd make the very most of his hating his father, and the very most of these wishes that his father had baulked and messed up for him.—The boy's decision was in no small degree self-protective, self-preservative: he needed emotions and objectives to stiffen his green growth, and he made passionately his own those that chance brought to his grasp.

There was only one road by which Frippie could come back on her bicycle from Malstowe. Alec, reaching it, looked eagerly along in both directions. Of course he would miss her! If you were too keen on

anything you never got it; you got the best things when you were quit ecasual abou tthem, not execting particularly, not minding much. . . . What should he say to her when they met, how should he begin? Would she get off her bicycle? At once? Perhaps she wouldn't quite like—it wouldn't look well. Still, she would manage that all right. Girls always managed to do things without doing them, in a sort of way. *Would* she get off her bicycle, though? The bicycle was a nuisance; it would have to be left somewhere—or wheeled along the lane and put against the hedge. That would be better. He could leave all that to her, what was the good of fussing? Alec was vexed by his agitation, it was ridiculous that his heart should be beating so fast. He was by the lane he had had in mind: if she would only come now! It would be awkward meeting her further down the road, with nowhere to go. Why not stay where he was, then? He sat on the stile and lighted a cigarette. No one seemed to be about. This waiting was the devil, it would make it much harder when she did come—if she did. When they had last met, she had kept him waiting. Mervyn said the reason girls did that was that it was a sort of score off you, it gave them an advantage and bucked them up. Alec wished again that it hadn't been so long since he had seen Frippie. The last time was when he had got up at half-past five, and walked to the East Fields where there were trees: he had met her there. Mervyn had told him he was a fool, because the girl would know he must be awfully keen on her to get up and go out

at that idiotic hour; and if a girl knew you were too keen on her she never liked you so much, and she was never such good sport. "But of course with a girl like her I don't suppose it matters. I wouldn't walk across the road for her!" Well, he didn't care what Mervyn thought. Of course Mervyn had to be different after getting engaged and it would be worse when he was married.

If they could have met in Blackberry Lane, nearer Malstowe, that would have been ever so much better. Blackberry Lane had a deep poppy-field on the other side of one of its hedges. The Vicar of Malstowe had once preached a whole sermon about Blackberry Lane. It was odd, how much interested every one seemed to be in these things. Except Wilfred Vail: he only laughed, and then began talking of something else. Alec thought for a moment of sending Frippie to the deuce and going to see Wilfred instead. Then he and Wilfred would have one of their drifting afternoons of easy talk and easy companionship. Perhaps he'd find him writing one of his articles for a Motor paper, and they would smoke Russian cigarettes and drink tea with a spoonful or two of whiskey in it. Wilfred's mother, at tea, would tell stories of Edward FitzGerald and his brother. Would whiskey go well after brandy?—No two people could be more utterly different than Wilfred Vail and Father Collett. Wilfred had said once that if he were dying, the smell of petrol would revive him. Yes, they would potter about the old stable, now used as a garage; Wilfred would tinker with his "baby" car, or with the other,

the large one: or he would put it off till tomorrow. There was very rarely anything in Wilfred's life that he could not put off till tomorrow. Alec, with his urgent and uncertain energy, dimly envied his friend.

He got off the stile. He would go to Wilfred's. He realized the much more level and peaceful time he would have there, with none of this wondering what he would do and say, none of this looming awkwardness and embarrassment and disappointment. He reacted violently for a moment under the stress of his waiting. It wasn't worth it! He wanted his friend, wanted to see him in those dirty grease-stained overalls of his. Wilfred's image was clear: the large bluish eyes, proclaiming their physical weakness and their benevolent intelligence through the round large glasses of those uncompromisingly serviceable steel-rimmed spectacles to which he had lately taken: the bearded sallow narrow face, the fleshy nose with its wide nostrils, the fleshy but close-drawn and positively-willed mouth. . . . Wilfred in his garage, working and gradually beginning to sweat—growing rather paler. Funny of him to wear a beard when he was only about twenty-five. Just because it had grown when he had scarlet fever. He said it was less trouble to keep it on. Funny chap he was, in some ways. Mervyn thought him an ass, but he wasn't, really, at all. Mervyn didn't know. . . . Alec looked up the lane. Not such a good lane as the one nearer Malstowe, no, not nearly such a good lane as the lane of the sermon. He pondered.

Why couldn't he see Frippie's face in his mind as

clearly as Wilfred's? It was absurd, but now he came to think of it, he could hardly tell what she looked like. What was the colour of her eyes? He knew how she would make him feel, though: if he kissed her, he seemed in some queer way to lose her. She came too close, then; everything came too close, it was tantalizing to think how it was. He never could realize kissing her or having her in his arms, couldn't believe in it, somehow, it wasn't at all like his idea of it when he wasn't with her. There was so much more in what he imagined, his mind was so much freer then.—How irritating all this was! But only because he had been a silly fool. He wouldn't be like that any more, he promised himself, uncertainly.

After all, Parham Lodge was too far, he couldn't get there by tea, he'd arrive unexpectedly. The Vails didn't like people "dropping in," not even their intimate friends.—He'd be late for tea at home, now. How flat it would be if he went back home. He might start walking home by the Malstowe road, away from Malstowe: a roundabout way, but he'd be going home then, and Frippie might overtake him.

He started off, ruffled and thwarted and divided, much annoyed with himself for the state he was in. Reaching a point where the road branched, he hesitated. Should he leave the road and cut across by the shorter way? He saw a girl walking slowly—no sign of a bicycle anywhere. Who was the girl? Why, it was Frippie, of course it was: on foot, why was she on foot, when he had been thinking of her on a bicycle all this time? Alec was bewildered by this

adjustment so suddenly forced on him. He hurried his pace. Further on, the road broadened away from the protective hedges, from the screened lane, he must reach her before she got too far.

He called to her breathlessly when he was near enough, and the girl stopped and turned, showing him a face that was quite unsurprised.

"What's happened?" he said.

"What do you mean, what's happened?" She looked defensive and resentful.

"I thought you'd be on a bicycle."

"Oh, I got sick of the old thing. I left it behind at Stevens's."

She spoke with hardly more than a trace of the Suffolk accent. Vail had told Alec that the "gay ones" among the country girls were always the first to lose their provincialisms. Besides, Frippie had been in service in Colchester when she was two or three years younger.

"How did you know I went in on a bicycle?" she asked suspiciously.

She didn't seem glad to see him, Alec reflected: why did she waste time over a question like that, as if it mattered how he knew? He stood looking at her, resolved that he would remember her face this time. Her eyes were certainly more green than anything else—a sort of pale green: they used to be friendly, though, they used to have a sort of yielding look that he couldn't describe and couldn't properly remember. She was always paler than the other girls. Her mouth—

"Oh, what are you gapin' at me for, like that? What's wrong with me?" she asked, with the same defiant suspicion.

"Come let's sit down for a bit." Alec looked away from her jerkily. "I haven't seen you for a—for a—for ever such a long time."

"We can't go sittin' here."

"Why not, why can't we?" Alec caught himself up. He remembered that he had decided not to be too eager.

"There's the men over in that field." She looked down, and half smiled: for a moment she dropped her pettish air, and seemed promisingly sly.

Alec's heart beat. "They can't see us if we sit down," he said. "Or why don't we go through into the lane?"

"Oh, I don't want." She raised her irregular light eyebrows, and gave him a familiar quick half-puzzled glance. "We'll be seen, standin' an' talkin' like this—an' I don't want no bein' silly an' that, not now I don't, what's the good? I should think you wouldn't neither, bein' as—"

"Don't let's stand, then."

He looked at her again, as she stood making uncertain little semicircles with her toe in the loosening earth. She was much more like herself now. Alec recognized that look she had of being a temporary and accidental occurrence—something that you could not count on and that was always on the point of slipping by. She had the same haphazard mouth, the same random fair hair for that blunt gay face

of hers. Not really pretty, perhaps—with such a pale skin—but oh, Lord! he must touch her. He thought of what Father Collett had told him, he took her hand and pulled her down with him on the grass by the hedge.

“Don’t you! Pullin’ me about like that—shameful! Spoilin’ my dress. An’ it’s so hot!”

She struggled, pouting like an aggrieved child, vexed by the boy’s awkwardly directed impulse. His being so awkward and untaught seemed to belittle her. “He’s a fair baby!” she thought. Alec put his arms under hers, he pressed her to him roughly and tightly. She struggled more violently, in a perturbed revulsion that was altogether new to him. He let her go, he was startled and scared.

“What do you think you’re doin’ of! Out in the road like this, you must be— I’ve to get back home, I can’t stay here, and you so foolish!” She moved away, but did not get up.

“I didn’t know—you didn’t mind before,” he stammered.

“Don’t you go touchin’ me, I can’t stand that touchin’, *touchin’*—”

She drew further from him, with a jerk of her body. Her face was in queer nervous puckers, and Alec noticed how dark she looked under her flickering eyes.

“What do you mean?” he said, growing angry with her now that she looked less attractive. “You never used, you know—you didn’t—”

“Well, I don’t want. I ain’t feelin’ well. I’m goin’ home.” She sat still.

"But why are you like this? What's the reason?"

"You fool!" she cried sharply. "Silly fool, you!" She leaned forward, shaking, hiding her face. "I'm goin' home."

"All right," Alec replied coldly. "Go home then."

"I don't know what call you have to talk to me that way! After what she done up at yours! You don't want to talk that way, you don't!" Her mouth sagged, she turned her back to him, choking.

Alec, surprised but not ill pleased, wondered what to do. He put his hand tentatively on her arm.

"I said no touchin'," she gulped. She took his hand away, but kept hold of it, with her back still turned. Alec was silent. He had instant pleasure in those hot little fingers that ran with their nervous animal life—fingers of such separately sensitive flesh from his own that possessed them. There was so much more in this than in those blundering kisses—Would Father Collett think this wrong? What was it he had said? That it was using up something that was meant to go to making you more spiritual—Alec tried, for piquancy, to recall the priest's arguments.

"Who will you go with when I— Oh, I s'pose you'll go with that there Miss Burke."

"When you what?"

"Oh, don't you trouble about me. No one wants to trouble about me." Her fingers twitched sharply.

"That Miss Burke likes you, you know she do."

"What, Doreen Burke! I don't believe it. Why do you think—"

"Oh, you don't know anything!" She pulled her hand away. "She do, though," she added with conviction.

"Well, I don't care if she does!"

"No, you don't care about any one, I know you don't!"

"Of course I care about *you*, Frippie, I—"

The remark sounded very stilted, it sounded silly. "What a fool I am!" he thought. He sought her hand, but she held it tightly clasped with her other one on her lap.

"I want some one to care about me, proper carin', not just makin' love and all that what's soon over an' done with—only it ain't over, neither, not one way, it ain't!" She had half-turned to him, but now she turned away again.

"Don't cry. Why should you? You've nothing to cry about."

"Oh, that's all you know. That's just like you. I wish I was a man," she declared viciously. "I'd show them—all them girls, wouldn't I? Sneaky sniffin' little beasts. I know what I'd do, and I'd do it proper! *You* don't know how, you don't! I wish I was you. I'd get that Miss Burke and I'd settle her, so she wouldn't go doin' no more of her preachin'! Told me Jesus loved me. What call had she, goin' sayin' things like that? 'Wish I was you. I'd give her Jesus!'"

"Why was Miss Burke talking to you? I don't see why she should interfere. It's no business of hers even if you aren't one of the Sunday School sort—"

"Oh, an' who told you I wasn't?" She turned and looked at him closely. "Was that why you wouldn't take no notice of me when you was sittin' on that stile?"

"What! you don't mean to say you—"

"Don't tell me! You must have seen. I went right by you—you couldn't help—"

"I swear I didn't see you. It's the most extraordinary thing, Frippie—" He was vehement. "I can't think how it could have happened, but I swear it did. I was there waiting for you, looking out. But I thought you'd be on a bicycle, that must have been why. I was looking out for a bicycle, you see—"

"There's lots of things you'll miss, if that's the way you go on!"

It was impossible not to believe him. Frippie looked at him half-humorously, half-tenderly: he was so much put about, and he had been there waiting for her, silly kid! The girl of eighteen felt very much older than he, felt as if she knew so much more. "What's the good of boys?" she thought. She kissed him and then escaped him with equal suddenness.

"Frippie! Why do you do like that?" He tried to take her. "You keep on teasing, it's awful, it isn't any fun for me, I can tell you it isn't!"

"Oh, an' you keep on askin' why—why—why! I told you I didn't like touchin'. It makes me feel all—oh, I don't know. I'm just as good as them, too," she went on—irrelevantly, so it seemed to Alec.

He stared moodily. That letting her go past him

on the road. How Mervyn would laugh, if he knew! Well. He wouldn't let anything go by him again, not *anything*. Surely if he made up his mind—

"Do you care s'posin' they see us together?" she asked suddenly.

"I thought you did. You said—"

"I don't mind, not now. Oh, what's it matter? You only live once, and if you're always thinkin', thinkin', and lookin' up an' lookin' down, you might as well be dead!" She put her arms round him.

"Would you mind if they saw us doin' like that?"

Alec kissed her, but not so violently, not so much losing himself or her as before, and he let her go before she struggled.

"I can't." There was a baffling expectancy in her eyes, and Alec formulated the feeling that he had had all the while, that she looked older in some way. "It's no use, it doesn't go right, not now.—I say, dear, you're friends with Mr. Vail, couldn't you get him to give you some of them nice grapes out of his glass house, and you give 'em to me. You could, couldn't you?"

She was eager, much in earnest, oddly tenacious. Catching Alec's look of reluctance, she at once took his hand.

"You could get them tomorrow, then we'd meet next day—early—like we did before, in the East Fields. I have been wantin' a taste of them grapes!" Her voice curled longingly.

"Look here—I'll buy you some, Frippie. I'll buy them tomorrow—some just as good."

"No, they ain't! I want Mr. Vail's. I seen them when I was to the Lodge with Mrs. Whitling. They're lovely, lovely an' black, an' ever so big! I don't want none out of a *shop*. I want them picked straight out—I want *you* to pick 'em for me, Alec dear. I thought you was fond of me." She gave his hand a feverish squeeze.

"All right. I will. Give us a kiss!"

He would realize her kisses now, he thought, he would know how, he was ready: it had been too sudden before, he hadn't waited enough.

"You will, really and truly—"

Facing him, she put her two hands against his chest, keeping him back. Her blunt face—her jolly libertine dissembling face—again recaptured something of its gaiety, but in a strained uneasy excitement that overlay her familiar look.

"Say you want 'em to take home. Say they're for Mrs. Glaive—oh, I forgot! Fancy me sayin' that! —I'm awful sorry about her, dear, but then she have money, haven't she, she won't feel nothin' and she've got some one to see to her. 'S rare hard for you an' all, though, ain't it?"

"Oh, I don't mind!"

"But you'll get them grapes!"

The great Glaive calamity did not divert Frippie for more than a moment. Her pale skin, so unlike his own, lightly and seducingly flushed, gave new stimulus to the boy. He took her arms, with one hand of his at the curve of the elbow. "You *promise?*" she urged.

"Oh, of course I promise. Let's have a kiss—properly."

"And you wouldn't mind bein' seen with me, would you?"

"Of course I wouldn't!"

She leaned a little to him, still keeping him back. Then: "There's that Mr. Perry comin'!" she cried low. With what seemed a single movement, capricious, skilful, instant, she had slipped away through the hedge.

CHAPTER VI

“**H**ULLOA, Glaive, where did you spring from?”
“Hulloa.” “Damn that ass Perry,” thought Alec.

“Been for a run or something? Pretty hot, isn’t it?” Mr. Herbert Perry, the People’s Party man, advanced, lithe and hale, brown and young. He was carrying a case of golf-clubs. “I say.” Reaching Alec, he stopped. “Do you know what’s happened?”

“Well, what?”

Alec coloured furiously, connecting the question with his stepmother’s flight. His intense annoyance at the man’s untimely appearance lapsed for the moment.

“Yetminster’s trying to stop the men going over his land to the Works!”

“Oh, that right-of-way business.” Alec’s tone was relieved and indifferent.

“You don’t realize—why, it’s madness. *He* doesn’t realize—”

Alec, as Perry went on talking, was vividly directed to the various masculine symptoms of the intruder: the facts that rudely projected were the swing of his arms and legs, the roughness and thickness of his clothes, the smell of his pipe-tobacco, the few close-cropped inches of hair under his cap, the razored

skin of his face, the look of his neck and chin, nothing like Frippie's.

"You don't mind if I talk to you in confidence, Glaive, do you?" Perry began to curb his agitation. "We're walking the same way, aren't we?" He dropped his voice and put a hand on Alec's arm, trying to make the boy feel pleasantly important. "Between ourselves, the men won't stand it. They've gone by that path to their work for the last fifteen years, the old Marquis always let them. They broke the gate this morning." He paused, in the manner of a public speaker. "They'll break it again to-night if they find it up when they come back. Probably they're breaking it now. They won't walk the three-quarters of a mile round twice a day. I know them, Glaive. They won't do it."

"It was just beginning," ran Alec's thoughts. "If only that fool hadn't come along, I could have—I would have!"

"They won't do it," Perry repeated.

"Well, it's no business of mine, is it?"

"Yes, it is. Your father's bound to be mixed up in it. There's a whole lot that could be done in an unofficial way; you can help. I'm at a disadvantage as a public man. Anything I might say to Yetminster would put his back up at once. These Liberal aristocrats! They're worse than the old-fashioned Tories! Lord Beauvais might have done this sort of thing thirty years ago, he'd never do it now. He and his kind know better—know how far they can go, and where they have to stop."

"What a sell!" Alec tormentingly reflected. "What a come-down." He had been so determined, too. Then he had only just kissed her—without making anything of it, really; he'd just held her hand. As if he'd taken all that trouble to meet her, just to hold her hand!

"The political sense of the possible," Perry was saying. "Compromise. Why, it's simply playing straight into Joe Matcham's hands—violence—"

"Oh, yes, you dislike that man, don't you?"

"Not in the least. I dislike his principles—or I ought to say I dislike his poisonous errors."

Perry gave an easy Club-room laugh. He shot out a few strokes at Matcham's political heresies while Alec continued to ponder on the unfruitfulness of his meeting with Frippie. Why was it that there had been so fleetingly little in it? Anything more had seemed so utterly out of his power. Well, perhaps even if Perry hadn't come— He tried to console himself.

"But don't let's talk shop," the politician continued. "Now your father's a shrewd man, he can get Yetminster to see what a rotten mistake he's making. Probably ruin his chances for the Board of Agriculture. . . ."

Perry elaborated this point, while Alec discussed with himself the matter of his promise to Frippie. He couldn't possibly ask Wilfred for the grapes for her. It was the kind of thing Wilfred would consider quite unpardonable; he knew Wilfred well enough for that. It might mean a breach of their

friendship, even. Besides, Wilfred would refuse. There was his mother to be considered, he would say they were her grapes, and of course they were. Both Wilfred and his mother would resent more than a little the idea of their hothouse grapes—fruit of such careful culture—going to gratify the whim of a girl like Frippie. They would feel it as compromising them distastefully, in an undignified way—whether any one knew of it or not.

“ . . . and the men will probably strike. How do you think the Casleys and the Bradwells will like that? Yetminster will alienate *them*, and they’re important. Does he think they’ll put up with a strike, just for him to lay out his private Golf Course in peace and quiet? Now, my dear chap, can’t you put all this to your father? He doesn’t want to have bricks thrown at his head, does he?”

Alec began to listen. “Will they throw bricks?” he thought.

“You don’t want them to go waylaying you and your brother? It’s a question of mutual interests, Glaive. When your interests coincide, you ought to get together. Yetminster simply must climb down gracefully. He can save his face easily enough. There’s a very ugly spirit in the men, just the spirit Joe Matcham wants, the spirit he can use—bad blood—”

“What’ll happen if he does use it?” asked Alec, listlessly distracted by Matcham’s name.

“There may be violence. It’s serious. They won’t stop at gate-smashing. They’ll be breaking windows

and burning things up. Remember most of these men have been in the war. They don't care about danger, they won't be afraid. Yetminster doesn't realize how things have changed. . . ."

Of course, if Alec did as Frippie had suggested and asked for the grapes for his family—if he said he wanted them for his aunt—Mrs. Vail would give them at once and think nothing of it. But he couldn't do that: you couldn't, when you were friends with a man. Even if he wasn't found out, he wouldn't be able to feel that he and Wilfred were friends any more. Of course Frippie couldn't understand.

" . . . it'll mean the undoing of all our work here." Perry threw out his well-shaped hand, with its fingers curving inwards. "You ask what'll happen. Everything that's unEnglish will happen. The men will do exactly what Matcham wants them to do. They won't vote at the next Election."

"Then the Liberal man will get the seat instead of you?"

"Oh, I'm not thinking of myself." Perry stiffened professionally. "The whole thing is much larger than anything personal. *Much*. It may mean the start of getting the whole country into a mess. This is an important district, politically; may set the ball rolling. If Matcham gets a hold with his crazy 'House of Workers' notions down here—'Labour Separatism'—and all because of a private Golf Course. The thing's ridiculous! As if the public Course wasn't good enough for any one! Best on the East Coast—"

Alec decided to buy the grapes, and lie to Frippie. He didn't like doing it, but after all she was a girl, and it was the only way out. He became conscious that Perry had stopped talking, that he was noticing his distraction. The boy grew embarrassed. Of course Perry would think he was distracted because of his stepmother. He would have to attend.

"Do the people you want to vote for you like your going about golfing?" he asked, glancing at the man's gentlemanly heather-coloured athletic-looking suit.

"My work's in the evenings mostly. I must keep fit." Perry answered with competence and dignity. "They understand that. And, between ourselves, they rather like us to live like gentlemen.—I had a twosome with Lord Charles Freyle yesterday." He betrayed some elation.

"Then why don't you get him to talk to his father for you?"

"Oh, no. Wouldn't do at all. Couldn't possibly broach the subject with him. It's a matter of diplomacy, my dear Glaive." Again he became confidential. "It's the right thing for Lord Charles to be on terms with me, don't you see? It's—er—disarming. And it suits me too: it's the English way, keeps anything personal quite out of it, on both sides. The House of Commons way, the sporting way. We understand one another. We're enemies, but we're friends."

"And you're both of you against Matcham!" Alec began to see light.

"Any sane man would be against Matcham."

"I don't know that I should be, if I were a working-man. His ideas are more—well, they're more exciting than yours."

"'Exciting!' Yes, that's just it. People can't stand settling down after the war, they want excitement and sensation. We're rapidly degenerating into a neurotic hysterical nation, Glaive, that's the whole trouble. Matcham is a man utterly ignorant of history and the very elements of economics, and so are all the other men who're behind these harebrained grotesqueries! But any quack nostrum for scrapping the Constitution will get a hearing nowadays. This 'Council of Workmen,' elected by a separated Labour, legislating with the House of Commons as Second Chamber—manual workers to vote only for the 'Council' candidates—Labour in one box and the middle and upper classes in another! You only have to state the scheme to prove its wildcat absurdity! All the worst evils of class separatism. None of the right fusion and fellowship. It would murder national unity!" Perry made a forensic gesture. "I'd back commonsense against 'excitement' any day," he went on more calmly. "Is it commonsense to stick a knife into the Mother of Parliaments?—Of course they'll precious soon try to get *all* the power.—We want reform, as we've always had it, that is by the will of the whole nation, through the representatives of the whole nation in the House of Commons. Reform's a blessing to the People, revolution damns them. Look at Russian experience. We want a true and progressive democracy, not a division of the na-

tion into two hostile camps, with fruitless warfare and interminable deadlocks."

"Well, if enough of the people want this separate Council, I suppose they'll get it." Alec was reflecting on the uneasy antagonism which he knew his father had for Matcham's Movement. Bricks. . . . He felt friendly to Matcham and wished he understood more.

"The People will get what they want. Of course. It's our business to see they are wisely guided. Do you know that these Separatist people won't have any members of their precious Council who aren't actually working-men? As if a man could fit himself for legislation in his spare time of an evening! What's to become of intellect? Can we do without intellect, tell me that! God knows I'm a democrat—through and through—but the People's Will must be expressed by the real friends of the People—by trained men, by educated men with a sense of history and economics—or we shall all of us go down to chaos and destruction!"

Alec was silent, meditating in some comprehension upon the friendly personal relations between Mr. Perry and Lord Charles Freyle.

"It isn't as if our Party weren't in earnest about Reform," the young politician went on. "We're pledged to drastic measures—tremendously drastic. Why, I've gone so far as to tell the people here—and I had authority for doing it, too—that hereditary wealth will have to go. Gradually, of course—by a gradual raise of the Death Duties. We can't at-

tempt too much at once; that isn't the English way—"

Alec looked up at the rugged highways of the sky, travelled by greenish clouds. He felt much less unsympathetic with Nature now—Nature that was so far off from all this talk. In their indifference to "the unrest of the times" Nature and he were agreed. Still, if this affair could be used against his father, to punish his father, to be revenged on him. . . .

"Yetminster can't do it," Perry was insisting. "He simply can't do it. Why, he's as bad as Matcham—the two extremes! What we want is a decent working compromise between the classes, got at in a decent way. Revolution will never do anything in England, the idea's grotesque."

Alec did not answer. The politician was disappointed in him, he had expected him to be flattered by this confidential conversation, enough flattered to let himself be used. Yetminster must have his warning somehow, and at once, or this might be the finishing stroke for the law-abiding party of Parliamentary democratic reform. It might even be the end of his own political career. Already, things had been pretty tricky. Perry was quite clever enough to gauge the dangers of the East Anglian temperament. These people had never wholly trusted him, these Suffolk peasants with their childish suspicions, their obstinate pseudo-shrewdness. "I een't *all* a duddy fule," one of them had told him that morning. He had often been disconcerted by the way they had of listening to him without contradiction or comment, and he

knew that Matcham's audiences didn't behave like that. He hadn't felt so sure of the factory workers, either. Still, he *had* been gaining ground. Things had been looking up, and he had got on famously with the women. Good looks and the personal touch—the right manner. He'd been especially successful with the women relatives of his political enemies. That extension of the Suffrage, what a capital thing! Practically the whole female vote would go for him—would have gone for him, if it hadn't been for this cursed affair. It must blow over, it must be *made* to. Perry thought of the excellent reports he had written to the "Chief"—giving credit to himself with such subtle indirection! Political expression had always come naturally to him: he was born for the life—born for a "career"— Well, if this young fool wouldn't help him, hanged if *he* wouldn't go and have a talk with old Glaive himself. He reflected on the good taste he had shown in not alluding to the Glaive scandal.

"You'll put in a word, won't you, with your father? That's all I ask." He broke the silence, conciliatory, suggestive.

"I don't want to be mixed up in it. The whole thing bores me." "Stop them throwing bricks at that devil," thought the boy. "Not likely!" They turned a corner.

"Oh, all right. It's really of no particular consequence, after all, what *you* choose to do. I only

wanted to— Why, what the deuce is going on over there?"

"Where?"

"On the Green. In front of the 'Parrot and Punchbowl.' It's a meeting. Gad, I wonder if the strike's on already!"

"Joe Matcham's speaking," said Alec, and quickened his step.

"Let him," Perry observed viciously. Then, as a shout came from the assembled men: "I shall go up to your place. If you won't warn your father and Yetminster, I must."

"Why not come on and tackle Joe Matcham?"

"I would with pleasure if I thought it the right move. My judgment is against it, at the present moment. Do more harm than good."

Alec looked at him contemptuously, and resolved that he would never be like that about anything. He felt oddly thrilled by a sudden sense of the virtues of courage and truth. Tremendously he wanted to hear what Matcham was saying. The *élan* of a fight flushed his spirit—a fight that would somehow be against his father, against what held his father up and gave him his power for hurt.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER Perry had left him, the boy hurried on toward the Green. He began to recognize some of the men in Matcham's audience—men he remembered in earlier days sitting in the "Adult School" with their shiny clothes and greased hair. And there was the man whose son had given Frippie her bicycle; Stevens, who kept the small ironmonger's shop at Malstowe, a tall spectacled ginger-haired man. He used to be a Radical in the old days, but was always terribly afraid of losing the gentry's patronage. He was standing now at the back of the crowd, with his long neck craned up towards the speaker. He was the only tradesman, so far as Alec could see. The lower grades of the middle class were represented only by him and by "the Reverend Carrick"—the Independent Church of Christ minister at Cranton, where the large Iron Works were. There were a few children about, with that curious look of stolid deformity that country children often have.

The crowd was mainly of the Works men, none of whom Alec knew by sight: there was a sprinkling of agricultural labourers. The editor of a local paper, a stooped gaunt man, very much the worse for middle age, stood next to Stevens, taking notes. Alec remembered hearing that he had been recently converted by Matcham, and let him do what he liked with his

journal. The few girls and women who were there all stood together, rather uneasily, on the outskirts.

As Alec came up, there was a deep roll of laughter, that seemed suddenly to puncture its expanded volume on a sharp staccato point. The Reverend Carrick had laughed last.

"That's right, Joe!" a man up at the front called out. "We don' want narthin' to du with Parlyment no more!" Alec recognized Jos Clark, Frippie's father.

"What were they laughing at?" he whispered Stevens eagerly, then looked to the knot of women for Frippie, thinking that she might be there before him. The idea that she was riding a bicycle irrationally stuck. "What did you say?"

"He was a-mobbin' o' Perry, a-talkin' like he talk," the ironmonger replied, on his guard.

Joe Matcham held up his hand.

"Now, boys, I'll tell you straight what we want. We want every man here—and every woman—to give their word of honour as a worker—and that's as good as the word of honour of a gentleman, and better—"

The men cheered loudly.

"I want you to give me, one and all, your solemn pledge that you won't cast a vote at the next Election."

"Or at any 'lection, Joe!" Clark shouted, his voice hoarse.

"Don't worry about 'lection after next. If we 'aven't got something worth votin' for by then, we'd best go crawlin' on all fours up t' th' big 'ouse,

and ast 'is lordship to spit on our 'eads to keep 'em cool. 'Ands up them as promise me not to vote next time!"

Every hand went up, and the crowd's hoorays were longer and louder. Alec scrutinized Matcham's pale face, with the prominent misshapen nose, thickened at the end, the clinching lips, the smashing chin, the deep-driven grey-green eyes, active with the will of the heavy rough-cast bulged forehead that overhung them. He was a stoutly built man of about fifty, from the North-country, but, except for the emphatic dropping of his aitches, the accent was not very marked. Alec wondered why he didn't look triumphant, joyous, with all that cheering that he had made. Instead, he looked grim and level and grave—with a gravity driven in as deeply as his eyes, and, like his eyes, lined bitterly round. He gave no room to jubilation. The man seemed girded, held fast, by a cold passion of tragic energy and sacramental hate. Yet he had made them laugh. The boy was strongly drawn to him: he sought identification with that massiveness and weight that so shamed the flimsy lightness of his own adolescence. If he could get such power as that! —He would get it.

"I tell you, men, I'm glad—" Matcham raised his head, and held out his arm with hand and fingers taut. "I'm glad this 'ere 'as 'appened to show us your way of shakin' 'ands with it. There are some questions we're *all* of us asth' now, and we're astin' them 'ard. What's the good of the vote? What's the good of Parlyment? We know just what

Parl'ment's done for us, and what we say is: 'Not enough.' Extry shillin' on the Pensions or the Insurance! Thank yer for nothin'! What we say is: 'Take them sops an' slops of yours, and sit in 'em—take a bath in 'em—anything you like—so long's you take 'em away from us.' Oh, we've got our Labour members an' our Radicals an' our People's Party men! 'Ave we? An' what good do they do us? What good *could* they do us when we give 'em a salary that puts 'em in the class that's on our necks? Men are 'uman. You know what 'appens. When they've been in that 'Ouse a month they begin to rot and they're clubmen an' fake gentlemen an' 'alf-'oggers an' quarter-'oggers, an' 'alf of 'em was that already when they tricked the labourin' man into votin' for them. We don't want no more writer Socialists and lawyer Radicals, we want the real thing and no fake. Don't we know what we want, men? Don't we know 'ow to get it? Do we think we'll get it by goin' on with bein' tricked by these 'ere Mr. Perrys, and scatterin' the few good men we do 'ave through a 'Ouse full of lawyers an' wire-pullers an' place-'unters so that they don't count? We've seen just 'ow much we got by votin', it's time now to see 'ow much we can get by chuckin' the vote to 'ell!'"

The last words tore Matcham's worn voice along a ragged edge. He stood with unchanging eyes upon the faces of the crowd. It seemed to Alec that he looked directly and understandingly at him. The boy was much moved. The men were shuffling and shouting, the women began to chatter.

"We know what we want now!" Matcham shouted, then waited a moment, with hand raised. "We know what. An' that's a law-makin' Council of our own folks and no other folks, elected by us and nobody elst—a Council what's our own clean through—a Workers' Council that'll mean the Workers' will same as the 'Ouse o' Lords used to mean the Lords' will— Men! You can 'ave that Council in three months if you all stand together through the country! If seven out o' ten of us want it, we can get it in a year! Then we won't 'ave no more cheatin' an' lyin' of us out o' our rights now that they dassn't rob us in the open. Mind you, it ain't only 'ere this'll be 'appenin', it's all over the country—all over!"

He paused, looking with a set distant gaze out over the open fields. His audience remained silent. Suddenly his eyes were back at them, and his chin set.

"We can't do it, can't we? Our friend Mr. Perry—our nice polite place-seekin' friend Mr. Tool Perry—'e says we can't do it. 'Quite impracticable.' That's what they've always said: if they don't want a thing they say it can't be done. Mr. Perry can wait. Mr. Ga-ma-li-el Perry, in 'is bran-new sporty togs! 'E 'as very nice manners, we don't deny, but 'e don't know everything. Do you think I'm a dreamer, men? Do I look like a dreamer? Is Mat Ford a dreamer, an' Ben Webber, an' Petey Farrall? I tell ye who's the dreamer now: it's that lord in t' big 'ouse who's dreamin' if 'e thinks 'e can stop you goin' to work by that path over the—"

A burst of cheering cut him off. Alec was surprised

by its intensity and protraction. Those other things that Matcham had said were so much more important. . . .

" . . . We've got the rights o' things in our 'eads now, an' it'll take more'n the newspapers and the 'People's Party' to get 'em out again.—Well, boys, the strike airn't off till 'is lordship takes what's left o' that gate away, an' then there are bigger things comin'!"

These last words were hardly heard through the immediate cheers that followed the reference to the gate, and Matcham twisted his lips.

"Bigger things yet!" he shouted. "What if Yetminster does give in over this? That won't alter what we're fightin' for. We won't go about sayin': 'Airn't 'e kind? Airn't 'e reasonable-like an' doesn't 'e love the pore workin' man?' The fight airn't over s'long's we're under and they're up." Matcham's gestures grew freer, they had a new violence. He raised a clenched fist and drove it down with an outward jerk of his elbow. "We're to see to it that this world airn't the senseless, stoopid, ugly, disgustin' scramblin' an' tusslin' an' bitin' an' tearin' for money as it 'as been all these years! We're to see to it that we 'as a chance to live like men, an' s'long's one man 'as 'is private car an' 'is big 'ouse an' 'is servants, an' 'underds of others 'ave to weigh in agenst 'im by bein' shoved out of a decent life, so long our fight'll go on! An' it won't be enough for us that two or three of our men 'ere an' there 'ave a better chance of gettin' rich—of risin' in the

world—” he stressed the word with savage scorn—“than they ’ad before. We don’t want a world where every man ’as ’is chance of gettin’ up an’ crushin’ others, we want a world where no man ’as the chance o’ bein’ crushed. We don’t want no jugglin’ an’ shufflin’ o’ the same old cards. By God, men, is it any better to ’ave an open field for this beastly scramblin’ mean cunnin’ crafty game o’ beggarin’ others an’ fattenin’ yerself? is it any better to ’ave an open field for this than a close one? It’s not a man’s game, that, it’s a brute’s game—an’ when they talk to you about savin’ money up an’ goin’ on to better wages an’ p’raps startin’ in business for yerself some day, they’re temptin’ you to be traitors an’ scabs. They’re tryin’ to turn you away from the brotherhood o’ man—that’s what they’re doin’. Ye can’t kneel yerselves down to their gods without yer stick yer knees in yer brothers’ chests an’ on yer brothers’ bellies—an’ the reason is that their gods airn’t real gods, they’re brutes—*brutes*—they’re brute gods—”

He stopped, gasping, and Alec was startled by the greyness that had overspread his face, a greyness notable, menacing. “He een’t well, Joe een’t,” the boy overheard a voice near by. “He du hully talk quare when he een’t well. I don’t rightly fare t’know what he’s arter, du yu?” Even Jos Clark and the Reverend Carrick and the editor looked bewildered, but they cheered; so did the Works men. Matcham had forgotten them all: not one of the audience, except Alec, had in the least understood him for the last few minutes, but most of them were

stirred by his emotion, drawn for the moment in its tide. Alec was as though battered and ungovernable in a rough sea-surge, feeling danger, exalted by it. He had not looked for Frippie again.

"Well, boys, God bless yer." Matcham had not wholly recovered himself, he spoke labouring. "Fare th' well. Talkin' airn't much, it's what ye think an' what ye mean. God bless you, women. We want you fightin' with us, we can't win without you. An' ye'll hold up your 'eads with the best of us, ye're not like some others who think they're your betters, others with fine white 'ands an' wearin' silks and goin' 'alf naked of an evenin'." The bitter severity of his contempt and condemnation seemed to gnaw at the air, and Alec had the sense of gooseflesh. "Women who wouldn't soil their fingernails with a minute of honest work, but soil their honour with the stinkin' muck of 'arlotry—parasites who can't find nothin' to fill up their idleness with but the wickedness of adultery! Thank God for *our* women, I say!" Jos Clark gulped uneasily. "Thank God for our wives an' our sisters an' our comrades in the fight!"

Matcham got down from the box, reaching his hand to Jos Clark for support. He went straight into the cheering crowd that pressed to him. They were slapping his shoulders and grasping his hands. Those last remarks had been perfectly well understood, as was shown by meaning looks and furtive smiles. The Reverend Carrick clapped till his hands ached. Alec was stunned. Joe Matcham on his father's side! He turned away.

CHAPTER VIII

THE boy walked off in dulled amazement. His mind hung motionless over the gross and clogged brutality of that denunciation. How was it possible! And Matcham had been so fine! He had told the truth; then he had lied, he had discoloured his truth—shattered it. Alec quickened to indignation. How had the man dared! What did he know about the Mater, he knew nothing—nothing—and he could stand up and shout out “Adultery!”—as if that were enough. He could say these wrong lying things to please the workmen, because he wanted to end up with their listening to him, and they hadn’t been listening properly just before. He said that for effect—no, he believed it, you could see that. These men didn’t know; what were they worth, what sense of justice could they and Matcham have, except just for themselves! They thought justice meant their having more money to spend and other people having less! As if there weren’t things more important than that. . . . It would be worse than anything, being ruled by these people. “Brute gods”—but you could see that Matcham would like to send the Mater back, and nothing could be more brutish than that. Carrick would send her back, no doubt, and Stevens—damn all of them! Father Collett was much wiser, he

knew much more, he would never. . . . If Matcham's lot did get all they wanted, it would be just as easy for his father to be what he had been, to do what he had done—just the same; *they* wouldn't punish him, wouldn't make him pay. . . .

Those men were shouting again. No, they weren't shouting, exactly, they were hooting. Why! Alec hoped they were hooting Matcham. He turned, and there beyond the "Parrot and Punchbowl," in rapid course toward the Green that lay at the turn of the road, ran the old "two-seater" car with his father driving it, alone. They were threatening him. Perry's remark about bricks rushed back to Alec's mind. Would they attack him? He thrilled and tingled, he began running back. He would have to defend his father, if they. . . . That was the worst of it, he would have to defend him. What would Matcham do?

Alec ran, keeping his eye on the car. It reached the Green a minute or so before he did, and as his father got out, a stone was flung, smashing one of the car's headlights. Mr. Glaive did not seem to notice, he advanced briskly, with his creeping smile, he held his little figure sharply erect. Another stone was thrown, passing close by him: Alec could not be sure if he had been hit or not. He was darting forward as Matcham cried: "Don't 'urt 'im, boys! What's the good o' that?"

"Mr. Matcham," said Glaive, "you are the chairman, I believe? May I address your meeting, and if I may, will you get me a hearing?"

"If the men want to 'ear yer, they will 'ear yer."

"We don't fare to wanter hear narthin' off o' *him!*" cried the workman who had thrown the first stone. "Why couldn' th' owd man a' come hisself, 'stead o' sendin' his little dawg?"

"Because he went up to London this morning. I've come on my own responsibility."

"Ho, run awuoy, hev he?"

"What I have to say won't take two minutes, Mr. Matcham."

Glaive's tone was one of friendly equal acquaintanceship. Alec noted, with distasteful admiration, that his father gave no hint of fear.

"Well, boys." Matcham held up his hand. "Shall we 'ear what Mr. Glaive 'as to say?"

"Goo on, Joe. Put him up!"

"He heen't lost *all* o' his guts, hev he?"

"An' no stones, boys. We play fair. Throwin' stones won't 'elp ye."

Matcham's voice was tired and hoarse. He leaned heavily on Jos Clark's shoulder. Glaive jumped up on the box, his grey dustcoat blowing about him.

"If you're expecting any message from Lord Yetminster, I haven't got one. That's the first thing." He spoke rapidly, with a direct business manner—no gesture. "Lord Yetminster had gone to London before I heard of what happened this morning. I want to tell you what I'm going to do, not what he's going to do. You can guess that I wouldn't have come out to speak to you when my heart's crushed by a private grief—a heavy personal loss—"

His voice trembled slightly, but no more than a man's should. There was a short snicker from one of the men, but it at once died, abortive. The reference had unmistakably touched their sympathies, changed their whole attitude: Matcham and Clark and the Reverend Carrick were the most evidently won over. Alec felt a drying heat on his palate.

"I wouldn't have come to you men if I hadn't felt I must come. Whatever sorrow—or shame—" he hushed his voice to the word—"whatever disgrace may come upon a man must not interfere with his duty as a citizen." The Reverend Carrick nodded appreciatively. "I want to tell you that I feel as strongly about this matter as Mr. Matcham or any of you, and I want to tell you this: that either one of two things will happen." He began to speak with great deliberation, separating each word. "Either Lord Yetminster will let you men go by that path—or—" he sped up his speech—"or I'll resign my position as agent and help you to break down the gate again tomorrow morning."

He jumped down from the box almost before he had finished speaking, nodded sharply to Matcham with a quick "Thank you!" and had taken several steps away from the crowd, through the clear space behind the box, before their stupefaction broke in violent cheering. Glaive did not turn his head: he walked on at the same pace to his car and began turning the crank, with his back to the shouting. Alec, who had drifted towards the road to get a better view of his father speaking, advanced from force of

habit to crank the engine for him. "You here?" Glaive looked up, surprised, but evidently pleased that his son had witnessed the scene. He did not ask why he had not come home before. "Shall I take you back?" he said, as Alec began cranking. The boy shook his head. He noticed that one of his father's fingers was bleeding at the knuckle. Glaive got into the car and drove off, as the men surged out to the road, still shouting, and waving their caps. The eclipsed Matcham waved his with the rest, but Alec thought he looked hit; there was something dejected, disillusioned, something lonely, about his walk and the loose worn hang of his figure.

The car passed out of sight. A couple of farm men recognized Alec, and one of them said: "Your father's a game 'un, een't he?" "Oh, he's all right," the boy replied shortly, aware that a number of the men had begun to stare at him, realizing who he was. He was too much in the thick of his thoughts to be embarrassed. There was Matcham, walking off with Jos Clark and the editor. They must know they were beaten. What would Frippie think of all this? Would she think anything? Grapes would matter more to her. . . .

The ginger-haired ironmonger was making for Alec: he looked pleased and cordial, probably he wanted to offer his congratulations. The boy hurried off to escape him. So that was how it had ended, with cranking up the car for his father. And cheers, not bricks. Victory at the price of a hurt knuckle. . . . His father had more courage than he had. Oh,

there could only be one way against *him*! Alec was choking impotently with tears and rage. Courage—cunning—it had been a great stroke—no one could deny. Father Collett was right: it was possible to be successful and yet altogether contemptible—more hateful than ever because of the success.—Matcham had spoken for his father, then his father had come in and beaten him. And no matter if the Matchams or the Perrys or the Yetminsters were up, his father was bound to win, bound to come in to win, just like that, with his creeping smile.

CHAPTER IX

“WELL, fat-head, dinner’s over.”

“I know that.”

“Why didn’t you come back with the old man?” Mervyn, with a peculiarly English look, lazy and athletic, was lying in a deep chair by the littered dining-table. “He said you were down at that show, he was hugely bucked.”

“Where is he now?” Alec rang the bell for some food.

“Study.”

“Hope he stays there.”

“Oh, he’s in a roarin’ good temper. He was frightfully pipped before because you didn’t turn up. Swearin’ at you like hell. Silly fool, you might think of me now and again. There I was hangin’ round for the bloomin’ sermon, and the guv’nor in the hell of a hair all the while. Then he put it off till four o’clock. Hangin’ round again. More naughty temper. Now we have to have it t’morrow instead—just as bad as havin’ it twice over. What the devil makes you so late? If you’d come straight back from the ‘Parrot,’ walkin’, you’d have been here before this.” Mervyn’s tone was unwontedly worried.

“Oh—I didn’t feel like it.” Alec was conscious of the impossibility of explaining why he had lingered and gone out of his way. Having refused

to ride with his father, he didn't want it to appear that he had simply walked straight back instead. "What's he doing in the Study?" he added quickly.

"Makin' out a statement for the Rat."

"I wonder how the Rat'll take it." Alec knew how well made out that statement for Lord Yetminster would be—a document of secret diplomacy. He sat down to his warmed-up beef.

"The Rat?" Mervyn waited till the servant had gone, his upbringing not being sufficiently aristocratic for him to ignore her presence. "Oh, the old man's safe. He knows that. There are too many on his side. Gad, it was rather a brilliant idea, you know. Pretty clever. The gate's gone already, Morris told me."

"H'm." Alec grunted, depressed by the look of the salt, messed and melted by the brown gravy at the side of his plate.

"Auntie's gone to bed with a headache." Mervyn spoke with the inflexion of taken-for-granted contempt that always accompanied any reference he made to his Aunt Cathy. "Very peevish. The old man's good spirits quite upset her. Always works that way. Before that, she'd been no end merry and bright—not givin' herself away, of course. Gone to bed directly after dinner, and now she'll have indigestion."

He took up the paper, and Alec ate, thinking of Father Collett's niece in the priest's dining-room. They would probably be having dessert at that moment, with port or sherry. Better stuff than this

beer. Alec had given no further thought to the priest's promised sermon. That was crowded out, well forgotten.

"Did you know that Father Collett had a niece, and she's staying with the Burkes?" he asked his brother.

"Oh, that foreign-lookin' girl with the untidy black hair? Met her in Malstowe with Doreen Burke this afternoon. Queer eyes. Damn good opinion of herself, I should say—"

"How old is she? Is she pretty?"

"Decent sort of figure. Looked as though she didn't wear stays and didn't have to. Don't know about her age, one of those girls it's difficult to tell. Not so awfully young. Didn't attract me, so I didn't think about her bein' pretty. She may be."

"You're sure she was the one I mean?"

"Of course she was, ass. Doreen introduced her as Miss Collett, said she was a relation—niece or cousin or somethin', I don't remember. Her eyes remind you of the Bullock's, too—though, by Gad, her build don't."

"You saw Nita today, I suppose?"

"Yes—or rather I mean I didn't." Mervyn frowned uneasily and took up his paper again.

"Oh, was she out? Rough luck."

Alec finished his meat in silence, while Mervyn kept jerking one leg up and down, in a disconcerting rhythm of unease. Then he dropped the paper on the floor, got up and pulled one of the straight-backed chairs round to Alec's side.

"Look here," he said, sitting by him. "I may as well tell you." He glanced behind him at the door. "Must tell some one. I want to get out of it!"

"Get out of what?" Alec stared, startled.

"Out of being engaged, you idiot!"

"Good Lord!—Well, I'm glad you do."

"Oh, are you? Plucky lot I care about *your* bein' glad." Mervyn seemed offended. "God, don't I want to get out of it, though! Of course you can't understand—"

"Why can't I?" Alec paused: he was not wholly unprepared for the announcement. He remembered one or two things that he hadn't made much account of at the time. "It must be pretty awful, marrying some one you don't want to marry. Don't you do it. 'S any way I can help?"

"All very well to say 'Don't you do it.' " Mervyn drew his chair from the table. "You don't know how damn difficult it is, when a thing like that's been runnin' on so long.—You know that girl Dolly Drake.—Go on, eat your bloody cheese.—Well, fact is I've been gettin' in deeper and deeper with her: I'm up to my bloomin' neck an' over!"

"What, you don't mean you've—?" Alec was caught back to Frippie and the mystery of his unknown.

"Of course not. Look out, or I'll punch you in the eye. This is the real thing, I tell you. Do you think it could make all this difference with a girl who wasn't straight? I'd marry Dolly tomorrow if I could,"

"Well, of course you can't marry Nita, then. Why, you oughtn't to—" Alec stopped, trying to remember what Dolly Drake looked like. She was a young cousin of Nita's, and she sometimes stayed with the Resines. Alec had only seen her once or twice, he had not noticed her much. "She's only a kid, isn't she?" he asked.

"Seventeen."

"When did you first—?"

"Oh, I don't know." Mervyn looked hard at the table-cloth. "It was something about the way—don't you know, the way she's made—that got me. She's so slim to her waist, then she's different, somehow. But that was only the beginning. Oh, Lord, you can't explain these things. It's the way she looks and the way her face changes when she smiles. She makes me feel she belongs to me, sort of, and then I think how I'm not supposed to have anything to do with her—not anything at all—that being engaged to Nita makes me an utter outsider for her. Oh, what's the good of talkin' to you, you don't understand. I keep thinkin' of how she goes up to her room, and does her hair and washes her face or gets her things out to play tennis in—and she might be in the North Pole's far's I'm concerned!"

"But you were awfully keen on Nita, weren't you?"

"Never so much." Mervyn was emphatic and convinced. "Never like this—nothing like. It was different with her. Somehow I could always understand what I felt about Nita—don't you know, I could get it all—all there was. There was nothing—noth-

ing past it, if you know what I mean? This is—well, it excites you more in the kind of way girls do excite you, *and* less—much less and much more. I don't know how it is, hang it all." He was trying to say that his feeling for Dolly was both more and less sensual than his feeling for Nita; that, with Dolly, the violence and the diffusion of his emotion were in contradiction. "This thing's like—God knows what it's like. I started playin' that old piano when I got back, that seemed to— I played all right, too, I can tell you—better than I used to when I was in practice. Or p'raps I only thought I was playin' so damn well because of the way I felt. Then Auntie had to come in, and of course I couldn't go on."

"You saw Dolly today, then?"

"Of course I did. What do you think? No one else was in. It wasn't on purpose; I didn't know and she didn't. I'd never kissed her before—"

"She's fond of *you*, then?"

Mervyn nodded. He took out his crumpled handkerchief and stared at it.

"What exactly happened?" Alec, flicked by emulation, was eager for details of guidance.

"You don't expect me to tell you, do you?" His brother opened cold eyes at him. "Not likely."

"Look here, Mervyn, you simply can't go on being engaged to Nita."

"If only it hadn't been for this business of the Mater—"

"What has that got to do with it?"

Alec lit a cigarette and offered one to Mervyn, who

took it absently. The young man went back to his armchair, and sat smoking, thinking. Alec sat by him, near the empty fireplace.

"It's got a whole lot to do with it. Every one would say we're a rotten lot. The guv'nor—"

"What the devil does it matter about *him*? What business has he—" Alec's antagonism struck violently.

"Oh, he'd cut up pretty rough. He'd be frightfully vicious because it would seem as though the Mater's runnin' off had gone and bust things up in the family. He'd simply hate people sayin' that—and of course they would. It would be a score for her, you see: of course it wouldn't really, but that's how the old man would take it, I'm certain. And people are so devilish touchy about morals an' that.—Damn funny thing when you think of it," he went on reflectively, "about the Mater. No reason why she should have stayed on here with him and us, was there—if she didn't want to?"

"Of course there wasn't! But why should you think of him? You're the one who'd have to marry Nita, you'd have to be married to her—for God knows how long, too—"

"I know that! But you've no notion how damnably difficult it would be to break off. The longer you go on bein' engaged the worse it is. This is dead private, Alec, but I haven't cared—not really cared about Nita for the last year or so. We've been engaged too long, that's the trouble."

He paused, thinking of how his love had turned

sour, or evaporated, with the waiting, waiting; he knew the treasure to be lost or spoiled, because guarded from him too long.

"Well," said Alec, "it's better, anyhow, than if you'd found out after you were married."

"Rot! It always happens then. Every one knows that. And it's not so bad because everybody's in the same box. You expect it then, and you know you can't get out of it. I should have had something, too.—Can't think how the beastly thing started, exactly. She began lookin' different to me, somehow, it got on my nerves, some things she did—the way she said things sometimes, an' all that. I s'pose it sounds awfully caddish, but it wasn't my fault, was it? I didn't want not to be in love with her any more—didn't do it on purpose, did I?—God, how sick I get of bein' always sort of put in brackets with her—'Mervyn an' Nita, Nita an' Mervyn'—all the time. It's enough to make any one fed up. Since I got out of the Army it's been ever so much worse. I've seen more of her, you see, been seein' her all the time when I wasn't at Oxford—"

"But how about Dolly? How do you know it wouldn't be just the same if you saw more of her? Wouldn't 'Mervyn and Dolly' get to be just the same?"

"Shut up." The young man winced sharply at that coupling of names. "Of course it wouldn't be the same, it couldn't be, ever. I'm *absolutely* certain. I told you it wasn't like Dolly with Nita, not even at the very beginning. Only I didn't know. Of

course Nita's a jolly pretty girl, and I'm fond of her still, in a way. She's a good sort, and that makes it worse."

"I can't see what right the guv'nor has to stop you—!"

"He's known the Resines for years." Mervyn spoke in intense depression. "Up at Oxford with old Dr. Resine an' all that. Nita will have some money, too—a fat lot of good that would do me, losin' Dolly! Of course *she* won't have anything. Her father's dead. She's here for a holiday, works with some milliner in London. You know what the guv'nor would think of that—"

"Oh, heaps of girls work for their living. Nobody thinks anything of it since the war."

"Oh, don't they! That's all bluff. At any rate it depends on the kind of work—how well it's paid—and whether they need to or not. If Dolly has to support herself, that means she's poor, and that's enough for the guv'nor. That's one of our wonderful old family traditions, never to marry a girl without money. No Glaive ever has. If I broke off and married Dolly, we'd starve. The guv'nor would see to that."

"Couldn't she go on working, just at the start, and you get something to do in London? I should have thought, if you really—" Alec broke off, embarrassed by the reflection that if his father cut Mervyn adrift, he would be the gainer.

"Rotten arrangement. I couldn't let her work. And the joke of it is that if we married and I got

some rotten job in London we'd both be workin' harder an' we'd both be worse off. Lookin' after a house or a flat without a servant would be harder for her than what she's doin', and she'd be worse paid for it. How damn silly! You don't think of these things till you're up against them and then you wonder why in hell people put up with such bloody foolishness."

"Perhaps the Rat might help you. He may be annoyed with the guv'nor over this gate business—"

"You know—it's one of those things one's supposed not to talk about, of course—but what's the use of always goin' on not sayin', when it's true? Fact is the old man's keen on Nita himself. I've known that a long time. Any one can see by the look in his eyes and the way he kisses her—"

"Good God, the old beast!" Alec flushed with bitter indignation. He saw his father, winning the Factory crowd over, play-acting with his "great grief" and "personal loss"—making copy.

"Nita knows it too. Somehow I don't think she minds, not really. She seems to—it was partly that that put me off, to start with—that in a way she—well, she almost plays up to him. You know how a girl can. Not that she cares twopence about him in that way, she doesn't, I know, but— We've never spoken of it, of course, and don't you, do you hear?"

"I wish he'd die!"

"You see, what he wants is to have her about—son's wife—in the family—callin' her his daughter, and that sort of fake, an' bein' able to kiss her.

That's the kind of thing a man seems to want when he's gettin' too old for— He wants it all mixed up with a whole lot of fake an' bluff. I tell you, I've watched the guv'nor a bit. He's been a bit suspicious lately, guesses there's something up. That's why he wants me to chuck Oxford so as to get married this autumn. Says he finds the work too much for him an' wants me here. Wants to fit up the cottage for Nita an' me—oh, Lord! In a couple of months we'd be married—"

"Christ!" Alec watched his brother's miserable and frightened face. "And they gave you the D.S.O. for being brave!" He had never seen Mervyn look so weakened, so helpless.

"Look here!" The young man stirred nervously in his chair. "It isn't only the guv'nor. I must think of Nita, there's been all these years, it'd be deuced unfair, after all it *would* be a dishonourable sort of thing, breaking your word, I don't believe the guv'nor would break his word, not like that, anyhow. It'd be awfully hard luck; a girl has some pride. You see, if a chap has had an understanding with a girl for five years an' very likely spoiled her chance of marryin' any one else—hang it all, it isn't the right thing, whatever way you look at it. I've got to take my medicine, that's all about it—matter of honour. You have to sacrifice everything when it's a matter of honour—let it all go—always have to—devil of a sacrifice—still—"

The two repeated words arrested Alec. "Sacrifice." "Honour." The phrase Matcham had given

him—"Brute gods"—beat his remembrance stingingly. It was a phrase that baffled his understanding, vivified his emotion. It meant much more to him than it meant to Matcham, but meant it far more vaguely. Could honour make a brute demand? Was this honour of Mervyn's really honour? Constancy—fidelity—dogs were faithful.

"Look here, would it—oh, damn honour!—would it be fair to Nita for you to marry her now? Couldn't you go and tell her the whole thing? It would be the truth, anyhow."

"It would be the same as chucking her. It's the kind of thing a man can't do."

"You're as important as she is—your happiness is."

"Well, but— You see, after all that there's been. There's been such a devil of a lot. You can't wipe that out. After I've said that no other girl could ever make the smallest difference to me, an' she said she'd marry me just the same, an' want to, even if I were smashed up for life or blinded—I'd feel such an awful worm." He got up trembling, and walked away to the window. "She'd have done it, too," he said, so low that Alec could hardly hear him. "Why the devil didn't I get a bullet through my head out there?"

"Oh, I say, Mervyn, you simply *can't*!"

Alec was keenly touched: he started to go over to his brother, but shyness thwarted his sympathy, and he held back. He stood, pondering on this fresh instance of the association, the alliance of his father

with the gods of the world. The world was for his father against his stepmother, just as it would be for him against Mervyn. Mervyn had first talked of the guv'nor, then he had talked of honour and those other things that were against him on the guv'nor's side. The winning side! Alec remembered how Matcham's meeting had ended. . . . He looked across to Mervyn, he must persuade him somehow; that mustn't always be the winning side. Mervyn, catching his brother's glance, tried to pull himself together, jerked his head back stiffly, then turned away, stammered "Oh, damn," and sat heavily down by the window, hunched up, his flaxen head between his hands. He looked done for, worse than collapsed. Alec could understand well enough Mervyn's wanting not to marry Nita, but he was puzzled by his wanting to marry Dolly Drake. The thing was dead serious, any one could see, and Mervyn wasn't the sort of chap who thought he was in love when he wasn't, and made a lot of it. That fellow Williams might be that sort: well, he'd better look out if he tried any nonsense on with the Mater! But Mervyn—he'd never even flirted with any one since he got engaged. What a damned shame!

"Look here, I say." Alec took two or three steps nearer his brother. "Don't you do it, don't be a fool. It'd be—it'd be simply hell."

"Oh, what's the odds? I'd get hell from the guv'nor if I backed out, and after all he'd be right, in a way he would, and they'd all say he was."

"No, you wouldn't—I promise you you wouldn't—"

"You? What could you do?"

"I could—you'll see—"

Alec thought: "I could kill him, why not?" Flashes shot in his brain, he stood leaning over to Mervyn, breathing hard, with an excited sense of power. He could be stronger than Mervyn, he felt quite sure he could. Mervyn was weak in some ways, always had been, he would give in unexpectedly, suddenly: how often he'd say: "Oh, what's the odds?" or "Well, let it go, then." He'd never be able to stand up to their father, not in anything like this. Alec must back him to the limit.

"Anyhow," he went on, "if the guv'nor cuts you off, I'll give you your share. I swear that, word of honour—"

"Honour," again, he thought. And of course he'd be bound, having said that. But that was different. He was impatient of his reflections.

"Awfully decent of you. Thanks. All the same, the guv'nor will probably live till we're both about forty."

—Kill him—Alec thought again—why not? "Doesn't matter, I'll get money, I can make him—"

What good would Father Collett's way do? he argued with himself. Just leaving it all, what would be the good of that?—leaving it, and thinking of nothing but your own blooming soul! And what good would there be in any other way, except—? Joe Matcham was right about compromise, that fool Perry was wrong. Matcham knew you had to have violence

—the only thing to smash these brute gods, as he called them. Of course it was! You only had to look at the two men to see that Matcham was a fine sort of chap and Perry a sneak.

"I'll manage the guv'nor all right," the boy insisted.—If only he could get Mervyn on his feet! That struck-down look he had. . . .

"Well, I'll tell the old man." Mervyn half turned. "Won't be any good. Still, he might put his foot in it, somehow—help me without knowing it, without meaning to. Just a chance."

"You won't give in to him, will you?"

"Oh, shut up." Mervyn relieved his dejection by becoming nervously annoyed. "Do you think I don't want to get out of it? If only I can, but I know I can't, still there might be some way. Oh, I'm talkin' rot!" He got up. "See that handkerchief?" He spoke with a mingling of shyness and bravado. "She threw it back to me. Some one came in, I thought it was Nita, but it was only one of the servants. She threw it back to me from her lap. It was the way she did it—so quickly—seemed to mean such a lot, somehow, seemed to make a sort of corner for us and showed she cared for me, her doin' it like that. Dropped from my sleeve, an' I'd left it when I heard somebody outside by the door. And she said, in quite a natural voice: 'Oh, I forgot you don't like being called *Lieutenant* Glaive.' As if that was the sort of thing we'd been sayin'.—Does make a difference, you know, when you have to be careful an' not let any one find out. Makes everything worth

so much more, makes it so exciting. With Nita, of course— Funny thing, what a lot her throwin' that handkerchief back like that seemed to mean—"

He paused, while Alec reflected that it probably meant she was used to doing it.

"She's got brown hair—and her eyes—it's her colour, too. If only she hadn't looked so beastly *well* the first time I met her, an' so different to Nita. It was that that did it."

"Yes, Nita's fair, and I suppose she isn't awfully strong."

"Nita's jolly pretty. I know she is. But Dolly's something else—I can't— Oh, I'm hit and hit badly, an' what's the use of talkin'? I'm talkin' like an ass. I'm only fit to go to bed, I'm all done in.—What were you up to this afternoon, away all that time?"

"Oh, I was with Frippie Clark."

"Christ you were!" Mervyn laughed raggedly. "That's all right, eh? You were with Frippie, and I was— What a pair of rotters! What a bleedin' family! Good-night, after that!"

Alec, as Mervyn left him, vindictively resisted the application of these phrases. It wasn't *they* who were rotters, it was the way everything went that was rotten. His rebellious hatred struck further down. Let his father try to stop Mervyn: he wouldn't forgive him that, or anything else, either! He'd hit back, he'd hit hard.

Alec's sense of the world's wrongness and his sense of his father's wrongness were in clouded blend: he

saw his father's evil drawn out and spread over the general surface, but never, for all its radiation, clear of its personal known character. The evil concentrated the more vividly for its expansion, and his father stood out, with a deepened blackness, as a symbolic mark for attack. The man was there, the man he knew; he could be reached. The personal stroke would grow for wide range to a stroke against what his father belonged to and what belonged to him, what held rule everywhere, discolouring, spoiling, preventing. . . . Brute gods and the sacrifices of their priests and victims—he was in battle against all that in his father, starting from his father. . . . He'd show that he was in the fight.

CHAPTER X

MR. GLAIVE, next morning, read the family Prayers in high feather. His "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness" was jaunty, and the Doxology, which he had read the morning before as though it were the most horrid curse in the language, was friendly and genial: "'World without end, Amen,' and all goes well with us, doesn't it?" instead of "'World without end' and be damned to all of you!" Glaive hardly ever swore in words before his family; on the rare occasions when he inadvertently did, he pulled up at once, frightfully upset by the compromise of himself, of his position.

After Prayers he took Mervyn aside by the fireplace. "Telegram from Lord Yetminster," he told him. "'Follow your own counsel.' Sensible man." He glanced at his bound-up knuckle. "Scars of war, what?" he commented, with a pleased chuckle. "About that other matter, Mervyn." He looked down his sharp little nose. "I've decided to make no move. Dignified silence. Don't you think so? Let 'em both go hang, eh?" Mervyn nodded. Glaive looked up, catching Alec's sinister gaze. "What's the matter?" He looked puzzled and annoyed for the

moment, and at once reasserted himself to Mervyn, in a louder voice, so that Alec and the aunt could hear him: "Especially now, you understand, when I've—er—won golden opinions from all sorts of people.'" He was always fertile in Shakespeare quotations. "'Worn now in their newest gloss,'" he continued, with an emphasis of relish on the last word.

Mervyn nodded again, and handed him a stuffed envelope. "Meant to have given you these before," he said.

"Oh. Bills."

Glaive's eyes darted. He took the envelope and sat down at his place. The aunt sat, too, with an invalid air. Alec and Mervyn remained standing, at opposite sides of the table.

"Lucky for you I've been a careful man." He turned the bills over. Mervyn had put the smaller ones at the top. "By Jove!" The man looked up with a jerk. "Young rascal. Ginnis & Cottrell, thirty-nine pound eight. You do go it." He paused, and his expression relaxed. "I don't suppose young Aldborough has run up much more with them. Very old firm, used to deal with them myself. What *my* father would have said to thirty-nine pound eight at a wine and tobacco merchant's. Of course I'm not legally responsible for this, that's why as a gentleman I have to pay it before any of the others. Ginnis & Cottrell know that, the dogs! They know the *name*.—Hammerton's, tailors, twenty-seven odd. Any more of these thumpers, eh?" Mervyn, in great

satisfaction at having taken what was so evidently the right moment, winked at Alec who did not respond. "At Cambridge they don't let them run up bills over a fiver, have to send them in to the tutor. How would you like that? There's a middleclass element about Cambridge, and it's been getting worse and worse."

Aunt Cathy, reading one of her letters, gave an exclamation.

"What is the matter, Catherine? Do give me some coffee. Well." He stuffed the bills back, and held the envelope up over his shoulder for Mervyn. "I'll write you a cheque for a hundred after breakfast. Remind me. It's not a precedent, mind."

"Thanks awfully."

A hundred pounds was considerably more than Mervyn had expected, even under these propitious conditions. He had not gauged the strength of his father's vanity and snobbery in wrestle with his meanness.

"Pay it into your Bank, then write your own cheques for these fellows. Ginnis & Cottrell first, mind.—Much better way. I can't be bothered writing cheques for all of them separately. Too many important things to be seen to, and besides I'm not a clerk." Glaive was getting his money's worth. He thought of how he would tell Lord Yetminster and other people. But perhaps Mervyn's extravagance might alarm Dr. Resine. "Time you settled down and married Nita," he went on with a jocular manner. "I'd much rather be writing cheques for fitting out

the cottage. Let's have a talk about that after breakfast, my boy. About your going back to Oxford. I want to put the thing to you—man to man. You see, you went up very late, because of the war; really you're too old for an undergraduate. And degrees don't matter, you know, unless you're going in for the Church or teaching—"

"I'm worried about dear Effie," the aunt remarked mournfully.

"You're an Oxford man just the same. In my day no man of family ever took a degree."

"Is Cousin Effie ill?" Alec asked, struggling from this running course of his father's self-expression.

"Oh, she says she's *taking care of herself*."

"Let's see." Mr. Glaive took the letter. "Why, she says she's nearly well! What do you mean?"

"'Nearly well'—ah, yes." The lady sighed. "'Nearly well,'" she repeated, shaking her head. "But she wouldn't say she was taking care of herself if it wasn't something serious."

"Oh, nonsense!"

Mr. Glaive, annoyed by the familiarity of that kind of observation from his sister, applied himself to his plate and showed his displeasure by silence. Alec was relieved of the galling pressure of his father's talk. He thought of the yesterday's breakfast: how different, what a lot had happened to him since. That giggling fit . . . he'd never be like that again. He couldn't possibly— As they all sat, eating and silent, bent from habit to Glaive's lead, the boy, saving himself instinctively from other more disturb-

ing and dangerous meditations, began thinking about his aunt. Why was she like that?

Mrs. Mowry had always been ill pleased by serenity and contentment round about her: agitations, lesser troubles and alarms, were the nurturing food of her spirit. A continuous series of such fears or worries she had always contrived for the satisfaction of her needs. Self-protectively, the widow had acquired fertility of invention, or her restlessness in ennui would have driven her melancholy-mad. She might have stagnated in a dreadful chronic depression without the kind of excitements and sensations she could make for herself. That these excitements were coloured unkindly and forbiddingly was blame to the malice of the sex-disappointment and the sex-thwarting that worked in her. She was thought spiteful, malevolent, a would-be mischief-maker, generally troublesome and ill-natured. As she was; but her repellent qualities were so evidently imposed on her by unhappy and unnatural conditions of life that only the shallow or heartless could have condemned her or not pitied. She wanted to be thought "temperamental," difficult but interesting; she wanted people to give her serious thought, to be put about by her and put out, to the end of the showing of herself as a person of some consequence and appeal: but she only succeeded in being voted a nuisance and ignored. She had made herself as touchy as a proletarian or an Irishman or an American, but her touchiness could not prick the English comfort of her relatives and neighbours, it could only prick her. It was in vain

that she was a mistress of the art of being offended. Yet she went on, thanklessly being thin-skinned. She had been diverted even from the delightful stir of her sister-in-law's elopement by reflections, voiced to the deaf ears of Mr. Glaive and Mervyn, on her not having been invited somewhere, on her having been passed by somebody or other without recognition in the Malstowe High Street. Equally, she was thanklessly vicious. It was true that she sometimes did make her brother violent and angry, but only when he wanted an excuse for being so, as she knew: and the knowledge took away all her pleasure. Besides, his violence and rank rudeness frightened her; she had to stop then. The boys took no notice of her, beyond a mild and casual irritation. She sadly lacked a husband. Her only real intimate was an old village woman to whom she was "kind" in the way of small gifts of food and money, for the sake of the moral prestige of it, for the sake of the idea that it gave her of herself. The old woman was shrewd: she repaid Mrs. Mowry's alms and insured them for the future by telling her of unpleasant things that had been happening to neighbours, or by inventing things of the sort, in case of need. And she would cunningly water the widow's morbid ingrowth of suspicion.

The thoughts that Alec had of his Aunt Cathy went within the circle drawn by the urgency of his present experience and emotion. These he found working toward some revision of his old feeling about her; he began to look at her from new perspectives. Before, he had fallen in with Mervyn's contempt:

or, Aunt Cathy was there for him as something unnecessary and distasteful, like a cold hot-water bag that you needn't trouble much about so long as you kept it out of the way and could forget that it was there. Now, she had an importance, as being disliked and put down by his father. Alec reflected that she had been living with his father longer than he had; her husband had died when Mervyn was a baby—killed in an accident on the honeymoon. Aunt Cathy must have been quite young then.—All that time she had been with his father, more than twenty years. Of course that was why she was disagreeable and unhappy—no wonder. Alec was surprised at himself for never having thought of that before: his father had been a brute to her as well, of course, he must have been, in lots of ways, not only the ways you could see. Same as with all of them—same as with the Mater and his own mother—there must have been lots you couldn't see, all along. There must be any amount he didn't know about Aunt Cathy. He glanced at her drained dissatisfied face with its dried-in lines, her resentful tightened mouth, her unquiet washed-out eyes with their air of expectation of affront from ambush. Not her fault. For the first time in his life he was sorry for her, for the first time he wanted to say something that she would like him to say. Cousin Effie—she was always trying to talk about Cousin Effie—

“Are they still living in that hotel?” he asked.

“Oh!”

The question was so unexpected, so unusual, that

Aunt Cathy jumped. Mr. Glaive looked up quickly and disapprovingly. "I think I'll go to Wetheringham this week," he said to Mervyn in a tone of superior detachment.

"You mean Effie and William?" Mrs. Mowry turned to her nephew, she laid down her knife and fork. "Yes, they are. It's a great mistake," she went on with thin positiveness. "A young married couple ought to be keeping house. I call it evading one's responsibilities. Effie says a home is so much trouble. But *other* girls keep house when they get married, other girls *have* to." She drew down her lips.

"I wasn't aware, Catherine, that you had been summoned as arbiter in Effie's domestic affairs."

"Oh, no. Of course I should never dream of trying to interfere—in any way. Still, I must say—It doesn't seem right to me. And there are no children, either," she added, patently aggrieved, but gathering herself back at once as though on the verge of an indelicacy.

"Do let us keep to matters of our own concern. Our minds and lives are not so empty, I suppose, are they?" Mr. Glaive spoke with studied elocution.

"Effie seems such a very near relative—almost like a daughter, to *me*." Mrs. Mowry tried to pause noticeably. "But of course, Sidney, I know—I understand you very well. When our hearts are all so full— I know *I* feel quite overwhelmed by it all, still; yesterday I was quite ill. These poor boys," she whispered.

"Really, Catherine, I see no useful purpose—"

"I was only thinking, if any other trouble were to come on us, now. Lord Yetminster *will* stand by you, Sidney, won't he?"

"Oh, a man has to take risks! Matters of that kind are quite safely in my hands, Catherine, you should know that by this time. I don't think I'm likely to hang my head!" Alec gave him a bitter look. "It's been one in the eye for that fellow Matcham, he thought he had the strike all going, and now every man's back at work, pleased as Punch!—I think we might as well make holiday today and all go out in the big car to Lowestoft or Felixstowe. Lord Yetminster won't be back till tomorrow.—What do you say?" He looked round the table, secure in his cleverness and his generosity.

"I can't come," said Alec.

"Why can't you?"

"Oh, I have to go to Malstowe." The boy be-thought him of Frippie's grapes.

"Well, we can run in there first—not much out of the way." The father was indulgent.

"I can't. I've lots of things to do."

"You know very well you haven't anything that's important—how should you? Don't be a spoilsport, Alec. You're always running off by yourself somewhere or other. What on earth did you do with yourself all yesterday? You knew I wanted you back at eleven."

"I went to Father Collett's and stayed to lunch."

"Oh, you were with Mr. Collett."

Glaive objected to a "Protestant clergyman" calling himself "Father," as he had often told his family, but he accepted Collett because he was of good birth and well off, therefore entitled to eccentricities. All things considered, he approved of this association of Alec's, and he was mollified now by Alec's having been at the Vicarage the day before. It seemed a becoming and proper thing for the boy to have gone, at such a time, to a spiritual adviser.

"Well, I think you'd better come with us today," he added in a tone of pleasant decision.

"I'd rather not."

"Suit yourself, then," his father retorted sharply. "You have liberty of action, as you know. Too much, perhaps, but that has always been my method. You will come, Mervyn?"

"Oh, all right."

Alec looked reproachfully at his brother. Of course *he'd* go, he thought. The gov'nor could sign cheques: what a beastly sort of arrangement it all was! But how could Mervyn be expected to— He didn't understand, he'd always do the easiest thing and not trouble to think.

There were three shops where he could buy Frippie's grapes: he'd go to them all to see which had the best, the ones that looked most like Wilfred's. Tomorrow morning he'd see her. If Aunt Cathy knew that, she'd be tremendously worked up. That sort of thing always seemed to fuss her frightfully—more than anything else. Alec remembered some occasions. How, when Effie's little sister, their cousin

Molly, had been staying with them, she had drawn him aside and told him, with a sort of secretive concern, that she didn't think he and Mervyn ought to take the child on their knees or carry her about as they did. "You forget she's not really a *little* girl any more," she had said. "It doesn't look *nice*." She had been quite anxious and upset. She spoke to Molly, too, and Molly had repeated to the boys her aunt's observation that "You'll soon be a little *woman*, dear Molly; you're getting a big girl now, you know." They had all laughed over that, then they had stopped laughing, suddenly embarrassed. But Aunt Cathy was different from his father about these things, Alec didn't feel that she was in the same way dangerously against him, she never had mattered so much, and she couldn't help it any more than she could help anything else.

The boy again tried to think of something to say to her, he wanted to make her acquaintance. It would be worth while finding out. . . . He looked up at his father, who at once pulled his chair back. The look was one he was not used to, it put him out. He said grace in the tone of one who has just been contradicted and can afford to be forbearing, knowing himself in the right. Mrs. Mowry immediately left the room, as though she had been driven from it but knew how to preserve her dignity under the insult. "I shall be back in about half-an-hour, Mervyn," Mr Glaive remarked tolerantly. "I see you in the Study then." He clipped a cigar. "I have to see to one or two little things in the village."

Now was the time. This affair of Lord Yetminster's gate had most happily given him a shield, it would be between him and public ridicule. Nothing could have better repaired his pricked inflation. It proved that he was "taking the blow like a man." He could face people now, sustained by this proof, put in the right way by it. He went out for an early gleaning of some of those protective "golden opinions" that he had won.

CHAPTER XI

UNLESS his father allowed him the extravagance of taking out the two-seater car, Alec usually walked when he went into Malstowe. There was a motor-cycle belonging to Mervyn, but Alec disliked the things. He also disliked using his own "push-bicycle," but it was the less unpleasant to him of the two, so this morning he decided to take it. He felt in too much of a hurry to walk.

It was not long before his haste was curbed. He had hardly ridden five minutes before the back tyre punctured. The accident dismayed him: it seemed like some wilfully malicious intervention between him and an unknown important accomplishment. It was like being held back in a bad dream. Alec was slow and clumsy about repairing: it would probably, he reflected, take him longer to mend the tyre than to walk the rest of the way into Malstowe. If only he had Wilfred Vail! Wilfred would do it in a couple of minutes.

He took the bicycle to the side of the road, and began stripping the tyre-cover. No, he couldn't go wheeling the beastly thing into Malstowe. Struggling with the cover, he heard the approach of a motor: one of Lord Yetminster's, he saw as he looked up. He raised his hat as it passed him. Lord Aldborough and Lady Barbara were in it, the young

nobleman acknowledging the salute with a blank face, his sister smiling as though she were content, Alec thought, to have caught him at a disadvantage. He wished he would catch Lady Barbara at a disadvantage. He was "our agent's son, mending his bicycle on the road," that was what he was to these people. Of course it was his father's ridiculous brag, his Glaive pretensions, that made it hurt. "These people" had brought about his father's triumph of yesterday. "Curse them, I wish Matcham would get them!" he mumbled. England a democracy! But even if it were, the important things, the things that clustered and festered in and round his father—they might most of them stay just the same. You couldn't trust Matcham after what he'd said at the end of that speech. All the worst of these "brute gods" would be left. Alec's mind remained vague here, but he clung to the phrase: it eased his rebellious indignation.

He had been working on the tyre for several impatient and exasperated minutes when he remembered that he had hardly any money—not enough to buy the grapes. He had been so reluctant to ask his father for money that morning that he had forgotten. Asking for it would have been putting himself in the same box with Mervyn: curse it, of course he was just like Mervyn in that way—dependent. Would Mervyn just keep on, in his slack way? Couldn't he make Mervyn see? Alec wondered how he himself could have managed to live "all these years" without seeing—putting up with everything all the time.

Would Mervyn go and marry Nita after all? That cheque for a hundred. If only he knew how to talk to Mervyn, but he couldn't say things clearly even to himself. . . . He'd have to have the grapes charged to their account, he must get them. How beastly it was! He was like a slave—his father's slave. How could any one say that was right? If only his father would die—he deserved to—it was what ought to happen—kill him. Alec's hand shook. Damn, he'd never get that tyre on. There was another motor car coming along, too. Not one of Lord Yetminster's this time, thank heaven. A girl driving—oh, yes, Doreen Burke. Did she see him? She always drove so beastly fast. He raised his hat, standing a little out to the road, with his back to that confounded bicycle. The car slowed, then stopped a few yards ahead of him. Miss Burke looked round, her fair hair blowing under her tam-o'shanter.

"Hulloa, Alec, d'you want a lift?"

He walked quickly up to her. He had remembered Gillian Collett. Then he remembered that Frippie had said Doreen "liked" him. He looked at her fresh-coloured sensible broad not uncomely face with new interest, but without any new attraction.

"Yes, thanks, I *would*. My bicycle punctured."

"Going to leave it in the hedge? Won't it get stolen?" She wanted to take him with her, but she made difficulties.

"Oh, no, not with the tyre off." Alec looked back at the maimed thing, sprawled up against the hedge, its wheel up in an awkward exposure like the leg

of a horse dead on its back—helpless, eloquent of the pathos of neglect. "I don't care if it is stolen." He opened the door and got on to the seat beside her.

"Do you want to drive?" She was thinking that she would like the changing of places with him, her being in the seat he had left, and he in hers.

"Oh, no; when you drive so much better." Suppose Frippie should see them? he thought: and why had Doreen told Frippie that Jesus loved her?

"I suppose you'll soon be going up to Oxford?" Doreen Burke wondered if she should ask him to the picnic-lunch they were having that day near Malstowe.

"Oh, not yet. Not for about two months." Those grapes—he would get them the first thing.

"You'll be up one year at least with your brother. That'll be jolly for you both, won't it?" Alec's hair, she was thinking, was much nicer than Mervyn's. Mervyn's was too light—like a doll's. Alec had rich hair—the sort of colour you saw in pictures. She began to drive more slowly.

"Yes, the war made him late going up, of course—"

"What have you got on for today?" If she asked him, would he go?

"Oh, nothing. Doing one or two things in Malstowe, that's all."

"I suppose you wouldn't—" The girl hesitated. He never had cared for "going to things," he was almost as bad as his friend Wilfred Vail. What was the good of asking him? Anyhow, he mightn't like to go so soon after his stepmother— But he seemed

different that morning, and. . . . Well, if he accepted, then she'd *know!* "You wouldn't care to join our picnic?" she inquired diffidently.

"Oh, yes. Rather." Alec again remembered Gillian Collett. "I'd like to."

"Good." She replied coldly, to make sure against self-betrayal. "I was rather afraid it might bore you. Just an 'anyhow' sort of affair—only thought of it last night. We're going up by the Martello Tower. I expect we'll play 'silly games.' "

"Oh, that's all right. Rather sport."

Would the "foreign-looking girl with the untidy hair and queer eyes" play the silly games too? Alec knew those games, so popular just then among the "young people" of his neighbourhood. They chose on occasion to take up with the amusements of their juniors, they liked doing that by conscious choice. Boys and girls of from eighteen to twenty-five would gather together and play catch-as-catch-can, hunt-the-slipper, "compliments," with agreeable licence to be as noisy and as free as they liked. "Silly games" or "kid games" was the local term: there was great variety of them, outdoor and indoor. Alec himself had hardly ever played; he had been too shy, and his physical energy did not naturally go that way.

"Will you play in the Tower or outside?" They had been driving in silence for a minute or so.

"Outside, I expect. It's such a fine day."

"Oh."

Alec had been hoping that they would play in the Tower. It would be easier for him, somehow, indoors.

—He must find out something about that girl, though he didn't much like asking. Gillian— How queer it seemed putting a girl's Christian name before Father Collett's! Of course it was her being a niece of his that made one want to see what she was like.

"I suppose your friend is coming?"

"What friend?"

"Why, the one who's staying with you. The one who's a niece of Father Collett's. I haven't met her," he added hurriedly, protecting himself from embarrassment.

"Yes, she'll be there, of course. I'm picking her up in Malstowe." Doreen reflected that Gillian was much older than she was.

"Father Collett says she's awfully—I don't know—views about things. He seemed a bit afraid of her, in a way."

"Oh, well, sometimes she is— I call her 'my trial!'" Doreen laughed. She knew she had to be careful in talking to Alec about another girl. "Clergymen's relations often are like that, you know," she added in extenuation.

"Like what, do you mean?"

"Oh— Well, she certainly does say the most awful things! But of course she's quite all right, really—" Doreen was in difficulties. "Her bark's worse than her bite. I suppose it amuses her."

"But what kind of things does she say?" They were in the outskirts of Malstowe: Alec began to be excited.

"Oh—you know. Things that are supposed to

shock you. I don't mind, she doesn't get any rise out of me!" Would Alec think Gillian pretty?

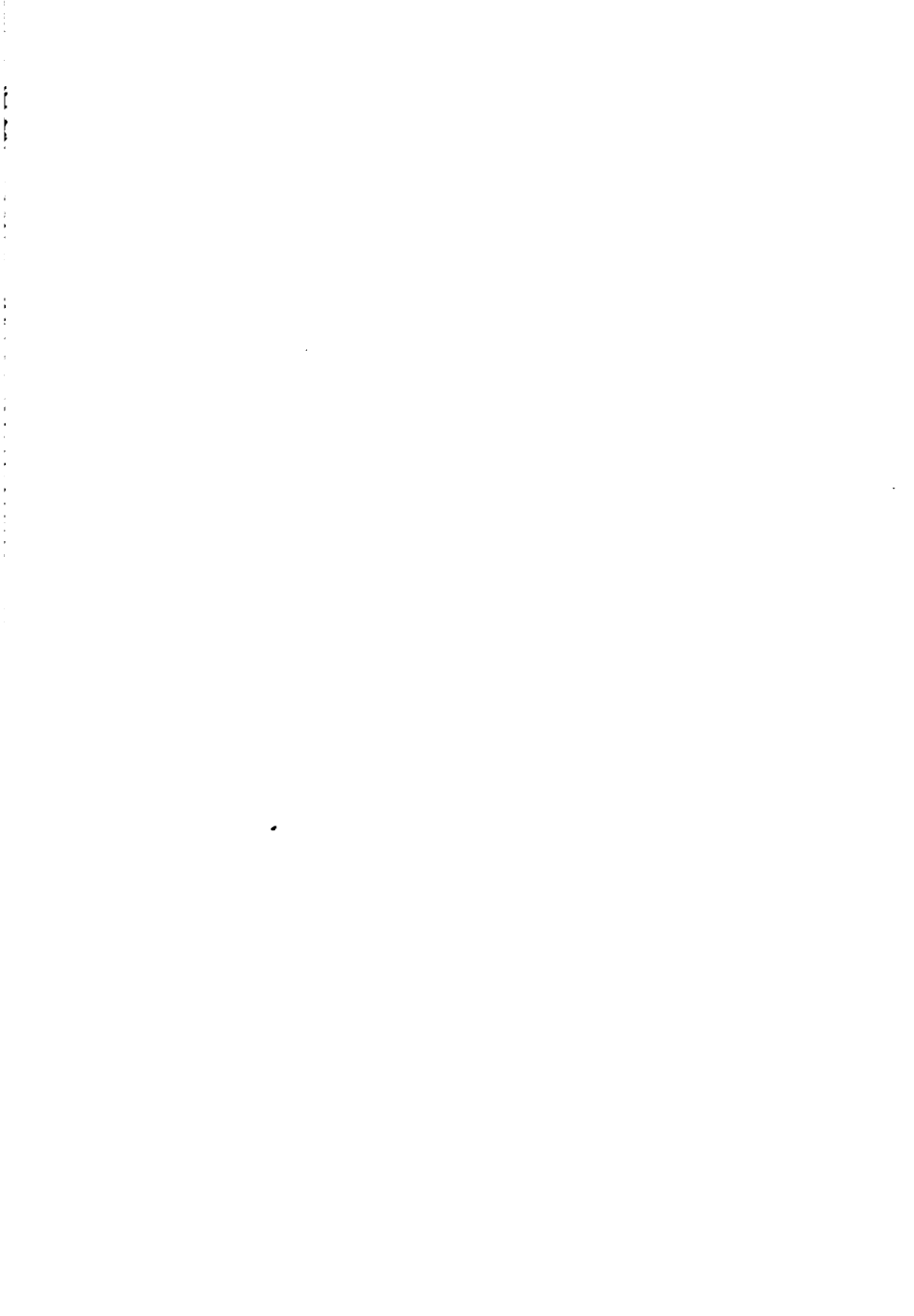
"Will any of the Resines be there?" Alec's thoughts went to Dolly Drake.

"Nita's in Ipswich for the day. I expect that cousin of hers will come."

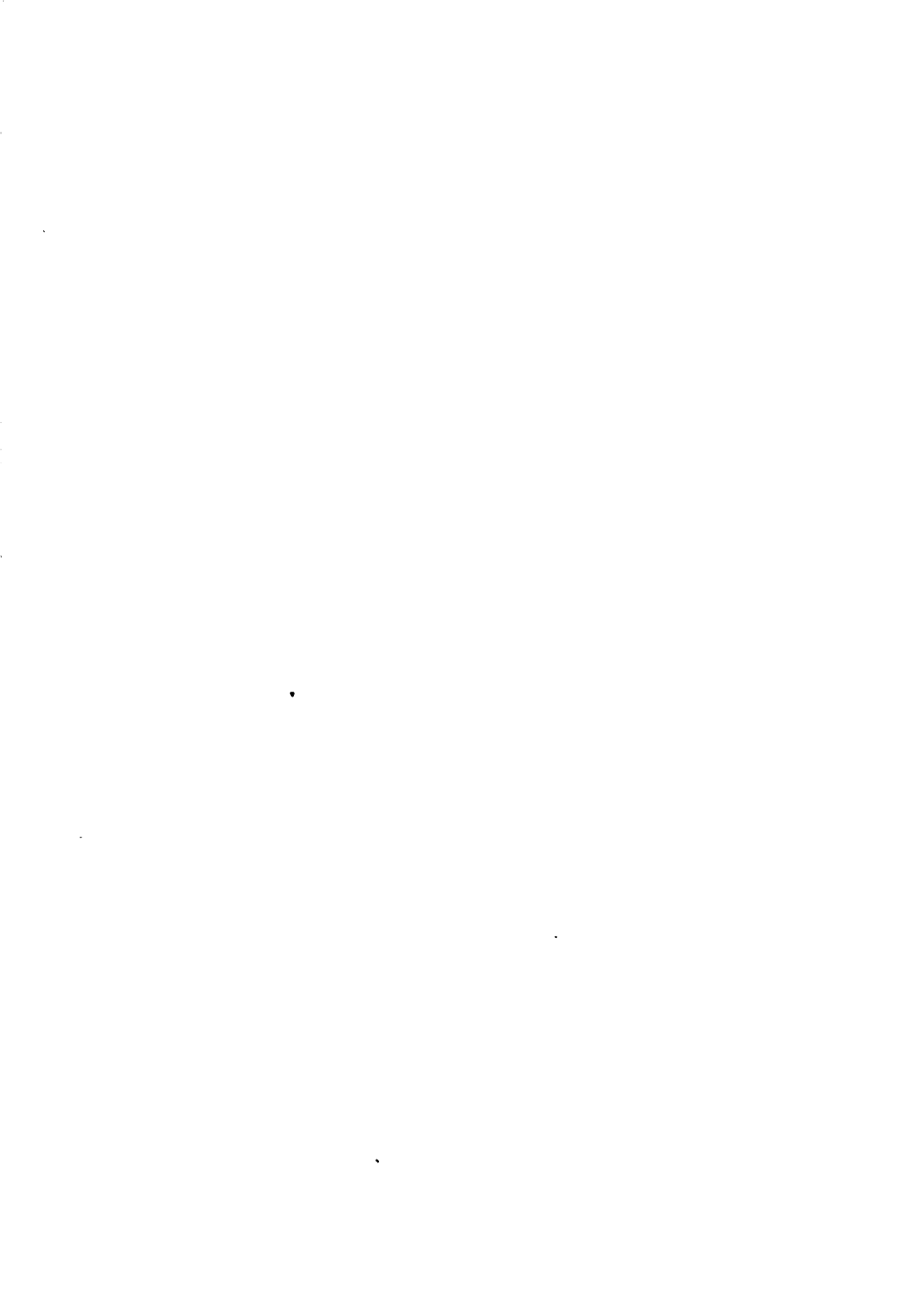
Alec looked at the girl. Evidently she disapproved of Dolly. She'd disapprove more if she knew about that handkerchief. He could tell, looking at wholesome fresh-faced Miss Burke, just what she would think of little Dolly's conduct—what she did think of his stepmother's, too. Would they *all* of them be for his father, wasn't there a single one—? Alec saw Matcham and Jos Clark and Aunt Cathy and Doreen Burke, all leaping to join hands together. Father Collett, of course, wasn't on any side, he wouldn't help for or against: but if he were Alec, he wouldn't be able to keep out of it like that. What would this Gillian Collett think? He wanted to know about her. At least she couldn't be like the others. Faced curtly by the antagonism that Society brought—and so unanimously—to his father's aid, the boy experienced what some might have termed a "hardening of heart." The new boldness, the new unscrupulousness out toward which he had been breaking, began to set in lines that were more determined and conscious and cold. He'd take every advantage he could get, anything would be fair with so many against him. He'd look round—practise his strength. The boy felt freed, he was put on a new mettle. If he made up his mind not to miss any chance. . . .

"Are you thinking about your exams?" Doreen asked gaily. She was pleased by his abstraction, and then by the way he answered her: "Oh, *no!*" He spoke emphatically and, she thought, with meaning.

"Well, here we are." Doreen slowed down to a stop outside a stationer's in the High Street. "She went in here."



DISCLOSURES



CHAPTER XII

A "PURE LOVE" is one of our realities; but the cries of poetic and moral rapture which this emotional state provokes have perhaps unduly shouted down prose comment on it. Alec fully satisfied romantic convention by the drawing out of his whole conscious being to this stranger girl: sense and spirit were so equally committed to the strong interlocking flow that flesh-desire, poetically in that tide-driven union, lost usual aspects for recognition. Mated under the new stress with these other stirrings, it took disguise, to the usual complete complacency of Nature who knows her ends sure, and the usual complete hoodwinking of her unknowing instrument. There was, with Alec, no such localizing of emotion as might give room to ribald sneer: and if he had been informed of the identity of the essential control of his condition with those old known forces of assault in shame and pleasure he would have given the lie, convinced and horrified. Even in his affair with Frippie, he would have resented such an association.

He also complied with romantic convention by "falling in love at first sight;" but not because he and Gillian Collett were of sympathies that had to rush together and cleave. It was not that their two selves had been complementary halves in separation, and

that now the sense of a perfect whole beat instant pulse toward fulfilment. The boy was at once in love because those recent motive hours of his had driven him swift to a point where such an emotional reaction had to be, on protective instinct: and he was subject to Nature's assertion of protest against a wrong weighting of his scale by hate and rebellion at a time when her mating urge had special claim on him. The intensity of feeling that had been roused in him she took and used for herself, moulding accident to her will. With the girl Frippie he could struggle only abortively in the way meant for him, he could not be turned wholeheartedly by her, familiar to his old simplicities and unawakenedness as she was, involved for him in a sensual impulse too light, too mere, too naïve. Nature's waste use of that impulse was a means, a step on: for the boy could now be drawn in deeper devotion, in surer exaltation, supported by the contrast of a desire so slight and raw and meagre and formless in its lack of the mystical interfusions of love. The village girl had not only been too simply female for Alec, she had been too young for him. Gillian Collett's maturer years gave her natural advantage of power over the boy's adolescence: not only her older mind, but her older looks, the very curves and lines of her face that denoted growth from young girlhood, impressed him to her service. It was her being so well a woman that brought him on to the sacrificial absorption in a new sex-humility that he found a miracle of ecstasy most of all.

He was breathless when he saw her, but not shy.

The girl overcame shyness, as she overcame him. It was her eyes in which he was caught at the first moment, eyes that were bright and courageous and mocking; yet, as Mervyn had said, they were like Father Collett's, they were live and affirmative like his. But they were not large, as his were, and instead of sloe-black, the colour was a pale elusive brown, with active iridescence sometimes showing light of green. She gave Alec quick uncertain almost childish looks, looks with shimmering edges, in contrast with the grown character that was so well determined in her face. His vision of her swam. There was a confusion in his sense of her dark hair that Mervyn had thought untidy for its being loosely caught and straying a little about her ears and neck: all the boy's perceptions of her were broken and mixed in. The wilful and liberal mouth, in rein, it seemed, from the clear-drawn nose and full brow, the faint and foreign flush of the olive tint which by English complexions showed the colour of some unbeliever's flower, the startling slightness of figure, the body like the crack of a whip—none of these was separate to the boy, all was herself.

Doreen Burke, who had become nothing, stood between Alec and Gillian, uttering words of which the sound struck him with a purely physical impact; nor did he take the meaning of Gillian's words in answer. The perception of her voice was with him, in blend, and particularly in blend with his sense of her eyes: for the voice, too, had edges that seemed to shimmer and break, the tones went in ripples, unexpectedly

changing and shortening and stilling and turning off. She spoke with just the quickness of her glance, with the same baffling conflict of uncertainty and affirmation. Doreen, critical of her at this moment, thought her nervous and assertive and curt. Fresh Doreen, with her common Saxon goldishness of hair, her blue and usual eyes, her frank unvarying face, her look of having been built honestly and well, gave Gillian an emphasis none the less impressive to the boy because its cause escaped him.

They went out to the car. Alec wanted to speak; he was urgent for the gain of some sort of interchange, something that might relate him to the girl. She had hardly said a word to him: he had stood by. She seemed scarcely to have noticed him, why should she? It would be enough just to be able to know her, a little, he thought. To be able to please her—somehow. Anything, so long as he was not left altogether outside. He opened the door to the front of the car for them, in silence.

"Oh, no," said Doreen, "you'd better drive, Alec."

"'Alec'?" Gillian's repetition of his name made his blood run, and Doreen looked at him uneasily. "Then you're the—the friend of my uncle's." She had been going to say: "the boy my uncle's been telling me about," but she reflected that he might not like being called a boy or having been talked of.

"Yes." He looked straight at her, in courage at the mention of a name that was intimate for them both.

"Oh, I didn't realize—" She broke off, recalling

what her uncle had said to her, how anxious he had evidently been that she shouldn't— She laughed.

"What's the matter, why don't we get in?" said Doreen, betraying resentment. Then, to show that she was not jealous, she suggested that she drive, and Alec and Gillian sit behind. "I know the car better, of course."

"What am I to do with this nice-looking babe?" Gillian thought. Boys of that age were so awkward to deal with, unless they were very bold or utterly uninteresting. This "Alec" wasn't uninteresting, he couldn't be that, with those very deep eyes. She didn't think he would be bold. . . .

"Why haven't I met you before?" she asked him.

"I don't know—" He hesitated; what a silly way to answer! "I didn't know," he went on, and then, with forced resolve, to defy his difficulty: "No one ever told me you'd even been down here before!"

"I haven't, often. I was here last April, though." She wanted to be kind to him, but was at a loss almost as palpable as his.

"Oh, I was away at school then."

Alec felt a certain pleasure in thus admitting to her what he felt as the disability and inferiority of his youth. He reached intuitively for the rôle of page to Gillian, withheld by pride as well as by fear from the daring, even in thought, of being her lover.

"And then I took Doreen to San Sebastian." Gillian sat sideways in the corner of the seat, observing the boy in scattered glances.—He must have met Carlyon-Williams: what did he think of him? had he

felt that affair very much! "Now I'm almost always in London. Are you often there?"

The curiosity that had prompted the following on of that question was at once satisfied by Alec's response.

"Yes," he said, throbbing with the suppression of his excitement. "I mean, not so often before, but now I'm going up to Oxford I shall be."

The girl looked away and bit her lip. She would have had to have been very much duller of observation to miss the relation to her of the wondering devotion in his eyes. He was a nice boy, really, no wonder Uncle Leonard liked him, but what was she to do? That vivid colour and his auburn hair—of course that meant he was "susceptible." A susceptible boy—calf-love. But she wasn't a calf: if she had been seventeen, now! Gillian remonstrated with this accident. Doreen liked him, there was that, too. Now she supposed she would either have to snub him or encourage him. But it was rather brutal to snub any one who would evidently give you so little cause. She thought of last April. . . . No one had ever looked at her like that before. It was—actually it was a little disturbing! How absurd! Well, if she encouraged him, he would get over it soon enough. They drove on in silence, as Gillian tried to determine, with the honesty that she prided herself on cultivating, whether she would really like Alec to get over it so soon. Her division of mind baffled honest conclusion: though she soon became intellectually convinced that it was her vanity that did not want him to draw out,

and some survival of morality or sense of convenience that did not want him to stay drawn in.—She mustn't play with him, she really mustn't—especially after the Carlyon-Williams affair—though there was a sort of temptation.

“What games do you want to play, Gill?” Doreen called out, not well pleased by their silence.

“Oh, anything, so long as you have to run. And, Doreen, I warn you, I shan't care what happens to my hair.”

“Oh, nobody'll mind about that.”

Gillian looked smiling at Alec. “What do you think, Mr. Glaive?” She retaliated on the ill nature of Doreen's remark.

“Oh, I shouldn't mind!”

“What wouldn't you mind?”

“Why—” He stopped and looked quite involuntarily pleading. “I mean what you were talking about. I shouldn't mind if your hair came down.”

“I never said it would come down! It might, though—” She laughed. “If you're really prepared for it!”

The car stopped, and Gillian opened the door with a sharp impatient movement before Alec could reach over to open it for her. He got quickly out, and she barely touched the sleeve of his outstretched arm as she followed. At once she attached herself to Doreen, she began talking, as they walked towards the Tower, about the arrangements for the day, where they would have lunch, when the others might be expected.—Why had she said that to him about her hair? she

kept thinking; she hadn't meant to, but it was leading him on, it was playing. . . . Her uncle would think she had done it on purpose, a usual female trick. It had been Doreen's fault. Gillian felt ashamed of herself, then she felt befooled, then defiant and determined, to no end, then insecure and reckless, as though of danger—but what danger was there?—then she was nervously buoyant. She laughed frequently, and she several times put up her hand, impatiently defensive, to her hair that the little quickening gusts of the sea kept blowing and tangling about her forehead and her neck. It was trying and silly, how often it crossed her mind that it was the first time any one had ever looked at her like that—like this boy. . . . She never gave Alec even a glance now, never spoke to him except as it were through the medium of Doreen. "She doesn't like me," he thought; "she wants to get away from me." When the others came, he would be kept more easily out, he would lose her still more. His excitement in the suffering he had from her touched the tightened sharp-tuned chords of the upper register of his senses, gave him a strained tremulously pointed acuteness in response that was utterly unfamiliar, with its wavering twinges of ecstasy and eager pain.

CHAPTER XIII

MR. SIDNEY STARR GLAIVE'S good temper did not last long. All that morning his elation had gone ebbing, by noon it was drained out. He had been quick to see that his achievement at Matcham's meeting was well dwarfed by his domestic calamity, that people were not going to let their pleasure in the latter event be spoiled by any such modifying diversion of interest as his wish had led him to expect. "Well, he may have pulled that off, but anyhow his wife ran away from him." Adultery was infinitely more appealing to the public mind than any strokes of local politics. Mr. Glaive's nerves were sagging as he came back home from the village. "Dirty-minded people," he thought, calling morality to his support as he remembered the sly looks he had had. And when he had done his best—done so well! It was most unfair. That scoundrel Williams! Both of them scoundrels. . . . "Dirty-minded, malicious people." McGill, the lay-reader, had met him in the road—intolerable bounder. These intimations of their "regard"! Glaive knew well enough that the only real regard McGill or any one else had was regard for the horns on his head.

Dr. Resine's visit, breaking in on the very beginning of the Study interview with Mervyn, made his sense of failure wince again. The doctor had as-

sociated himself with him, had talked of "our children." His manner seemed impertinently to discredit Glaive's monopoly of injury, to suggest that Glaive, by some fault of his, had hurtfully involved the Resines. "How could you have been such a fool as to let yourself in for this?" was what Dr. Resine hinted, and: "Well, now it's done, we must help you to make the best of a bad job." When a man has been deeply wronged, for him to be treated as a fool! And all the notice Resine had taken of the gate affair was by some stupid casually shot in remark about "wigs on the Green!" There was no unfriendly word between the two men, but the doctor left after their brief colloquy with the impression that "Glaive wasn't taking the thing well at all," and Glaive himself, giving his impressive parting handshake, was cut by discontent and irritation. His "old friend" was not helping him, not standing by him as he should.

The injured husband's first emotions had been theatrical, now they were real. Now, he began for the first time really to miss his wife. When his nerves were rasped he had always particularly needed her. The dramatic excitement of her departure and of his rush for London; his absence, and then the further dramatic excitement of his speech on the Green, had carried him over so far: now he realized as a fact that if he called for her she would not come, if he sent for her she would not be there. The astonishing wickedness of her conduct came home to him with a quite new force. She must be absolutely heartless

. . . who could ever have suspected that? And he was getting an old man. What could the law be about to allow this—this crime against him? Why, the law even allowed her to keep the money she had of her own—all of it—monstrous! If he'd run off with another woman, he would have had to give Miriam money: yet there were some fools who said that the law was unfair to women! Of course he might get damages out of Williams, but then he'd have to pay for that, one way and another. . . . Mr. Glaive remembered that under certain ancient laws adultery was punished by death. Too drastic for our day, of course: he would not have wished that; it was his natural nobility and generosity that prevented him from wishing it. He would have liked a heavy sentence of imprisonment, a sentence that could be remitted at the husband's will. Surely that would be fair? At least he would have had the opportunity, by remission, of showing that he was noble and generous: as things were, who would know what he was? He was a fool to them all, a laughing-stock.—Yes, the husband should have power to remit the penalty: then the wife, in gratitude, would return to him—unless she were lost to all sense of decency. Miriam surely would. But would he take her? His thoughts of imaginary situations played on, a little relieving him. Would it be possible to take her back, after that man . . . ? Could his delicacy of feeling . . . ? No, it would never be the same, he would still be mocked. Better that she should come back, and he be sternly final, immoveably final, in his dismissal: greatly merci-

ful in his reprieve of her . . . on condition, of course, that she should never return to that low blackguard.

Still, the loss would be there. She had so contrived it that his loss was unescapeable. He wanted her, her absence deprived and shocked him. All these five years she had been to his hand, she was now habitual. He had never regretted the marriage—never. It was this that made it seem so unfair. And to think that she, with those large truthful eyes, that gentle voice, that loving mouth—all her sweet tenderness and humility, as he had thought. . . . She had never crossed him, hardly ever contradicted him. He could see her: tall for a woman she had been—had been!—with ample lines of breast and figure . . . a stronger appeal than his first wife had ever had for him. How could he get on with any content, any comfort, without her? How could a man be expected not to miss all that, to get used to having to do without so much?—To have to lie awake thinking of her with that vile beast, that thief in the night. . . . Williams was about twenty years younger than he, not much over thirty. Miriam was thirty-one. How gross! Mr. Glaive's eyes filled with angry tears.

How easy it had been for her! He had slept alone that night. All she had to do was to get up when every one was asleep, and leave the house. He had kissed her good night in bed, and when he came in to kiss her good morning—a loving husband—she was gone. A note left for him on her pillow. He had known exactly what to do: prompt action was always his forte. In his dressing-gown he had gone and told

Mervyn, calmly, briefly, holding up his head. He had gone to his sister, he had said: "You are now the mistress of this house. It is for you to inform the servants—at once." Other men might have delayed weakly, he had fronted the situation.—That swine! Of course he had been waiting for her in a car. Nothing could have been simpler for them both. It was outrageous that such a thing should be so easy and so safe. To get up at night, to go out, to get into a car—that was all. She knew they were all sound sleepers.

He must have been utterly blind. Of course other people had seen what was going on . . . of course. This hadn't come from a clear sky for them, he could see that. The way they took it . . . he had been the only blind one, because of his trust, his love. To think that all these others had seen which way the wind was blowing! For how long had he been a figure of ridicule in the neighbourhood without knowing it! When he had thought he was making this impression or that, they had really been laughing at him up their sleeves, all that time. Even Catherine—it had not been the same astounding shock to her; she must have suspected.

Mr. Glaive took the note from his breastpocket. It stung him more sharply now, because self-pity held him in closer grip.

"I am leaving you and going with Hugh C. W. He will not conceal it in any way, neither shall I. If I had told you and then gone, there would only have been useless scenes, and I should not have changed

my mind, so I am going in what seems to be the best way. I have wished to leave you for a long time now, he gave me the strength. You have never cared for me except because of yourself, and you have no right to keep me. The happiness of two people who love one another is more than what you want. I am sorry to leave the boys, but they have their lives before them, an unhappy and weak stepmother would not have done them much good."

"She admits she is weak," he thought, wilfully misreading. "I suppose Williams wrote the letter for her," he tried to sneer. "If she had told me and then gone. . . . She never would have dared!" He was furious at the charge that he had not cared for her except for his own sake. No one else must ever see that letter, should he destroy it? He locked it up in his desk.

The drive to Lowestoft brought out new lines of his loss. He had always liked being seen about with so handsome a woman as his wife, he had liked it consciously: the pleasurable response of his vanity had never failed him. Now there was only Catherine. Catherine! Nobody could be proud of being seen about with her. Really it had been a mistake his persuading Catherine not to marry again. She was no credit to a man's household, a silly tiresome woman to have living with you, the irritation of her wasn't worth the money that she'd— He had been punished for his consideration of her interests in stopping that marriage with an undesirable man. If you were a good brother and a good husband, this was the sort

of thing you got for it! And why wasn't Alec there? The trip wouldn't have been such a fiasco with the four of them. Alec was getting more selfish every day—a selfish young cub. He would talk to him when they got home; he must use his authority, he had always been too indulgent.

The depressed three of them finished "making holiday" sooner than had been planned. They had a late lunch in Lowestoft, then were walking unwillingly down to the sea, when Mervyn, who had hardly spoken a word, said suddenly: "Oh, why not motor on to Yarmouth and go to a Beach Concert?" Then he laughed. Mr. Glaive thought he had never heard so impertinent a laugh. "If you think I'm in a mood for vulgar comic songs!" he snapped back at him. He halted. "You know perfectly well my opinion of Great Yarmouth: it is the vulgarest sea-side place in England!"—"Oh, I say, what price Margate?" Mr. Glaive turned from his son to show his displeasure, and they all three found themselves walking back to the hotel where they had lunched. They started home at once.

Alec, when they arrived, was not there. His father's resentment stirred angrily. Now would have been the time for his proposed family harangue, and he could have given the boy a sound dressing down first. It would have been a help to him, would have eased him, doing that, and then making the dignified and resolute address that he had planned. "The subject in my household must now be regarded as closed for good and all." That was how the address

was to end. His rage sputtered out against Alec in vicious little red sparks. The boy could go gadding out, day after day, at a time like this . . . flagrant . . . indecent. He was probably with some loose girl or other. Mr. Glaive's eye had its tawny gleam.

There awaited him in his study a telegram and a parcel. The telegram was from Lord Yetminster, saying that he would be back that day instead of the next, and could Mr. Glaive call on him that evening after nine? This meant that unless Alec returned very shortly the address must be postponed again. Glaive would have to give time to considering the right line to take with Lord Yetminster, he would have to be quiet, think it over. That statement he had made needed a little revision. If Miriam had been there now, he would have consulted with her, she had often been helpful in such things—feminine tact. There it was again! He was being reminded at every turn, he would always keep on being reminded. . . . Then he must dress, that would take time too. Mr. Glaive did not habitually dress for dinner, but he liked Lord Yetminster and the Freyle family to think that he did: besides, he felt at a disadvantage when other people were in evening dress and he was not. Miriam would have straightened his tie and selected his most appropriate shirt.

He looked at the parcel, which was addressed in neat capital letters and had an obliterated postmark. "From the library, I suppose." He was opening it when Mervyn knocked at the study door to complete the interview that Dr. Resine had interrupted.

CHAPTER XIV

ALEC returned a little before dinnertime; he was in the hall as his father, in evening dress, came downstairs.

"Well, Alec, I want to speak to you."

"Oh!" The boy started. "All right," he answered absently.

The indifference of his tone ruffled Mr. Glaive more than his former sullenness and hostile looks had done. The man quickened his pace, he led the way to the Study.

"I have to tell you quite plainly that your conduct these last days has been most inconsiderate and unbecoming. Most selfish. Do you understand?"

"How do you mean?"

"How do I *mean*!" Alec's dreamy look, his tone of vague curiosity exasperated him. "I mean that I am entitled to some consideration from you. Yesterday you absent yourself for practically the whole day, you say nothing to me about your intentions, you think you can come and go as you please."

"You never told me I couldn't."

"No." Glaive was bitter. "You trade on my indulgence. That is just it. I want you to understand, quite clearly, that so long as you are underage you are under my authority. You knew today

that I wished you to come with us to Lowestoft, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"'Oh, yes'!" Mr. Glaive mimicked him savagely. "That didn't matter, I suppose? My wishes count for nothing at all. You are becoming impossible.—Are you going to sleep, sir, may I ask? You didn't want to go, so you didn't go, that's it, isn't it? Now what are you grinning about?" Alec's remote smile was the most infuriating thing of all.

"I didn't mean to. It wasn't at you." Alec looked fixedly at his father, trying to realize that he was there, exactly the same as he had been before. . . . His irrelevance seemed grotesque.

"Now understand me. If your own sense of what is and what is not decent conduct, decent consideration, isn't sufficiently developed, it must be trained. Or you'll go through the world a nuisance to yourself and every one else. It's for your own good. Consideration for others is the first article of a gentleman's code. It's his starting point. Haven't I considered *you* all your life long? I've fed you and clothed you and educated you, and all I expect in return is common decency of behaviour! Don't look at me as though you were in the right! I won't have that impertinent staring." "Not even the grace to hang his head," he thought.—"I've been too lax, that's what it is. Now listen!" He paused, and noticed that the boy's eyes were queerly like his mother's in the early days. With all her faults, *Anne* would never. . . . His hurt revived. "To-

morrow's Sunday. We go—all of us—to our parish church for the morning service. I myself shall go to the early service, for Communion. You can go or not go to the early service, as you choose. That is your own affair, to be determined according to your inward feelings. As you know, I should never dream of dictating in so intimate and personal a matter of conscience and your private state which you alone—The Sacrament. . . . That is between you and—well, you know. Mervyn is coming with me, and your aunt Catherine. We all feel, under the conditions . . . What I do insist upon is this." He squared himself by the mantelpiece. "That you come to the eleven o'clock service. I shouldn't need to mention it, but you have been irregular in your church attendance, much too irregular. You've been getting into loose slovenly habits all round, I've taken far too little notice—"

"I can't go to the service tomorrow."

"What! I haven't rightly understood you."

"No, I can't."

They had both paled, but both were calm, though with the father the calm was only momentary.

"You *shall*!" he broke out in a cold convulsion of anger. "You're up to some lewdness—meeting with some low female. I will not be flouted! Understand that definitely, finally. This ends it. I forbid you to say another word." Alec left the room at once.

The father, alone, was assaulted by faintness and nausea. He turned, leaning heavily on the mantelshelf, and was confronted by the reflection of his age-

ing face in the mirror. "Grey hairs," he thought, "grey hairs. And this is how I am treated!" His face was grey, too. Old—and he felt ill. They would kill him . . . failing health. People would say he was beginning to "break up." He was divided between self-pity and self-concern. That boy—to make him feel ill—it was criminal. Criminal. After all his kindness and generosity to them both. He thought of the cheque he had given to Mervyn; his parting with that hundred pounds began to hurt him. "They trade on my affection for them, they trade on it."

He sat down draggingly. Miriam could have managed Alec, he would have handed him over to her . . . no further trouble. Now there was only Catherine—useless. If the obstinate young pup defied him, what should he do? He passed his hand over his forehead. This fresh aggravation, this fresh difficulty—at such a time. One would have thought that any son with a spark of filial feeling. . . . Yet Alec, out of sheer self-will, could hit at him in this way, hit at him when he was down. It was abominable! Again his anger leapt. How could he be fit for seeing Lord Yetminster, after this? Feeling ill. He wasn't up to it, he wouldn't go. Lord Yetminster would understand. It would be natural, it would really be the right thing for him not to go. He got up and looked at himself again in the mirror.—Yes: Lord Yetminster would see how deeply he had felt it. Perhaps he had better go. Turning, he noticed with intense irritation that Alec had not shut the door

properly; it was slightly ajar. The mixing in of this familiar annoyance with Mr. Glaive's other emotions was surprisingly exacerbating. He swore. Never in any single point was he regarded. "A man's foes . . . those of his own household." Sighing deeply, he sat down again. The quotation somewhat restored his sense of his importance.

The dinner-bell rang and he heard the boys coming downstairs; rude intrusions of sound upon him through that negligently closed door. As he was getting up to shut it, he heard Mervyn's lowered voice: "Oh, I say, I didn't ask the old man about—what we talked about, you know. I meant to, but I simply couldn't. You don't know what he was like—the very worst. Simply awful." The voice trailed off, and the listening father could not catch Alec's reply. Secrets from him! Conspiracies against him—no trust—everything that was mean and underhand. What had they been talking about behind his back? He reflected vindictively that he would find out: he'd know when Mervyn did ask him. His answer wouldn't be one to please Mervyn, either, be sure of that! For a boy to speak in such a way of his own father . . . his father who was suffering and wronged, and had just given him a hundred pounds. No feeling—the pair of them against him.

Sitting down on the chair by his desk he was irked by a hard extrusive contact. . . . The parcel that had come that afternoon. He had just untied the string when Mervyn—he remembered. Now he would see what it was, they could wait for their dinner till he

came. Why should he be the only one to be put out? He unwrapped the parcel, and the book that was disclosed opened of itself in his hands. It was a Rabelais, with the leaves turned down at the chapter of Panurge's consultation in the doubtful matter of cuckoldry.

CHAPTER XV

ALEC was not occupied by reflections on this lull in his hatred of his father: this complete and sudden diversion of his energy, this instant obliteration and replacement of his objective, he did not even partially realize. The figures of Matcham, Perry, Father Collett, Frippie, faded out: she was there for him, she herself, none else. He was no longer perplexedly concerned with ideas about things in Life, with the uncertain troubling suggestions that had risen out of the air of those last two days. This girl who was so much for large ideas, for spreading Causes and reconstructions, whose whole pride was in thinking "we," not "I," had in a moment narrowed Alec's arena to the personal, dyed it with the personal deeply through, from confine to confine. By the accidents of her hair and eyes, and the make of her body. Nothing mattered to him now except as it affected her for him, and him for her. If the "brute gods" left them alone, they could be or not be: if his father kept out, he could be, or not. Rebellion, revenge and hate wilted out of life, foreign growths in a soil which was nothing for them. The important thing was that his father should not stop him here where his sole will lay: injury to his father was of no moment, unless it would help Alec here, and the boy would have done any benefit to his father

or to any one else for the same end. It was thus that the pure and absorbing passion of first love alchemized wicked unfilial thoughts and intentions.

The boy, clutched by Life and reeling under Life's tremendous values, could be grazed for two or three slight moments by surprise at his father, even by pity for him, for his worried vainly assertive buzzing on through an existence that was not life at all, and surely never could have been. His father could never have known—never. And Mervyn—what a pity that Mervyn could not know, either; that he could think himself in love with that girl Dolly Drake. Alec could have no enthusiasm now for his brother's rapport with Dolly or breach with Nita: both girls took their places with Doreen Burke for added emphasis of the uniqueness of Gillian. It could not matter much which of the two Mervyn married, Mervyn who was not in love. Dolly! who at the picnic had been flirting with somebody or other, more or less, whenever Alec noticed her, which was not very often. But he had seen that her eyes were empty; and she was coarse—coarsely built—yes, "beastly well"; certainly Mervyn was right about that. Mervyn—it was a pity: he could not think of him much, he couldn't be awfully sorry—how could he? A boy of nineteen, suddenly upraised to a flaming isolation from the entire universe, may well be enwrapped in his miracle.

He did not hope that she loved him. Such a miracle as that he could not reach to: the conception of it went beyond light, it went rushing into the void

of black that lies uncompassable beyond the light that is last and brightest. To his quite serious sense it would have been not less than enough to kill him. But in the miracle that he had she took her conscious part, for she had touched that first astonishment of his doubt and fear and pain, and changed it of her will: she had of intent liberated the paling blood of his first emotions to expand and mingle in veins more greatly charged. She had asked him to meet her. She knew. The marvel was theirs.

For two or three minutes only they had been alone, all that long afternoon. The rest was shouts and chatter and many faces confused to the likeness of one intervening animal substance thought of as "the others." This substance obscured her. She seemed to be dreadfully far off; it was as though at any moment she might vanish. Even when he was quite close to her, as often during a game of Prisoners' Base, "the others" robbed him of any real sense of her. He kept in struggle against thwarting odds. At the end of that game Doreen had said, with a rather petulant snapped laugh: "Now, Alec, you're to be captain of a 'side' in the next. I hope you're duly elated." The phrase, though so usual to the girl, so much in her type, had struck him heavily. "Duly elated." He pondered on its meaninglessness to him. "Elated"—"Gillian"—was it possible to think that name, to harbour it? If as captain, with first choice, he were to say: "I'll take Miss Collett," the world might suddenly stop. He chose Doreen. It was for hide-and-seek. Gillian as she passed by him to go

on the other "side," murmured: "You must find me"; she flashed on him the stupendous range of meaning that Doreen's pondered term could have. While they were hiding, Alec, instead of keeping his eyes on the ground according to code, made eager scrutiny. Soon he saw her at the top of the Tower: he could not tell if she had seen him looking. She disappeared behind the parapet.

When he found her, she was sitting on the sunned stone floor, closely in a corner, her knees drawn up, and her tiny brown hands that Alec had not noticed before, clasping her knees. The attitude seemed to condense and impress her. She was flushed, and, though still, her limbs and features seemed to have underflow of motion.

"You were slow," she said, smiling quickly, then turning from him.

"I came at once—straight." "The others" could see him, standing up. He sat down, not close to her. They were hidden by the parapet. "Is there any one else hiding up here?"

"I'm going back to London tomorrow evening, you know."

"What do you mean? Won't I see you again? Couldn't you—? Your hair looks very soft," he told her, gravely urgent. "Is it?"

"That's why it gets like this. Hair's difficult if it's soft—difficult to keep in order."

The boy's question seemed to have stilled the impatience that had run flecking Gillian's first words. She spoke slowly, shifting her posture: with her chin

resting on her hand she looked at him, with a look that was disquieted, almost sad. "I've annoyed her," he thought. What could he do now? If only he knew just what she would like. Footsteps sounded in ascent on the steps.

"I'll be here tomorrow morning," she said, without any emotion, it seemed, but that of decision. "Eleven."

"All right." They both rose, and Doreen was there, with some boy.

With all the driven will of youth, with all youth's illusive sense of power, and youth's proud ignorance of the inevitable unplaced world-old use that is made of it, the use that smells of death, Alec went to the appointment that Sunday morning. He rode Mervyn's motor-bicycle: Mervyn, when he had asked if he might, had said: "I haven't lent it to you, mind; you took it." His father had been at a bedroom window, he had seen him start. . . . In a few minutes they would all be going to the Parish Church—one of Mr. Braithwaite's sleepy sermons—McGill reading the lessons. All these people—"the others," all of them—they were husks. How could they go on?

As the lover rode, wondering, Father Collett, feeling anything but a husk, was finally revising the sermon that he had been "dared" to give by a teasing boy, slightly drunk. In an hour or so he would be delivering it. Had he in any sense evaded his promise? had he been in any way obscure, guarding himself? He read intently, with tightened mouth and harassed eyes. At least he believed what he had

written—all of it: he would never, so he passionately assured himself, have consented to speak against his belief—not even for Alec.

The boy thought suddenly of his stepmother. He felt, for the first time in thought of her, ashamed. Gillian knew, of course. What a pity that the Mater should have done that, now! It was something that came wrongly, something to be fended off, something of hurt. He would not for the world have soiled her by mention of it. It would be terrible to speak of the Mater or of Williams in her presence. Alec was perturbed.—On the way back yesterday he had seen a man and a girl in one of those shells of houses that the encroaching sea had battered and wrecked near by the Martello Tower: the man had his arms round the girl, their heads were touching. Alec had turned away, repelled. Before, he would have taken it as a matter of course, he might have laughed. Now it seemed disgusting, blasphemous. And his stepmother's elopement had something of the same look, now, but involving him more, so that the shame of it was heightened and much more personal. Such were the workings of feminine refining influence, such were the tricks of sex.

CHAPTER XVI

HE reached the Tower before eleven, and waited for her, lying on the grass of the artificial hill that rose up round the empty moat. It was one of those Towers built in Napoleonic times for protection along the coast: a heavy Georgian edifice, not much in use either before or since the recent war. The drawbridge was always down, and the gate rarely locked. To the east was the sea, immediately, and westward a stretch of brackish river, with a jutting landing-stage, near which accumulated sail-boats and row-boats—small haphazard craft. The southward cut one blankly off: here were dykes and no human signs. Malstowe to the north had at this distance a quality of picturesqueness always freshly surprising those familiar with the near aspects of the town: seen in the rise of her hill past the water-reach and the flat-land she suggested by a skilful stroke of pretension, Venice; even the tower of her waterworks helped to impress the resemblance; it was not too unlike a Campanile, seen from there. But river and dykes and flat-land to west and south were prevailingly Dutch: they had the reassuring philosophic repose of Dutch vistas. In the tempered kind warmth of the summer morning those sails of pale yellow and rich red-brown stirred dreamily, and the very smoke from the tavern and the few cottages that lay between river and sea was

half-asleep. What Alec noticed was that there did not seem to be any one about. His keen sentience and beating expectation, in divorce from all these appearances, did not parley with them either in resentment or acceptance. The scene looked tolerantly on at him, and continued in its mood.

He could not see Gillian in his mind with any clearness, but this did not tease him as with Frippie: he was full of the sense of her. It was now past eleven. The distant bells of Malstowe Church had finished the tolling of the last ten minutes before the Service hour. Alec looked up along the rough road toward the town; there was no one. He could just discern a sailor—a woman carrying a pail. Gillian not in sight. . . . After a minute or two he turned toward the sea, and there she was, within speaking distance of him, walking rapidly along the beach, with unswinging gait, her head raised. He stood up. She walked looking to the sea, so that her face was from him: there was a loose curl under the tassel of her black fez-like hat. She wore a blue serge dress with a green sash. Alec's eyes widened and lightened at the lines of her straight figure, with their firm and delicate boldness of stroke—away from her slight but not boyish hips to her breast and neck, and again away downward to the rippling edge of her skirt that seemed drawn close to her, yet unimpeding. And she came for him, altogether for him: she had banished "the others."

Approaching the Tower she turned and saw him. They went to meet each other.

"Now tell me first—" She gave no greeting, she spoke with a tightened abruptness, her unsmiling ambiguous glance dropped from him at once. "Tell me just how old you are."

"Nineteen. Doreen could have told you that."

"I don't want to talk about you to Doreen. Doreen wants to talk about you to me. She could have told you how old I am, did she?"

"No—of course." They began walking up the hill to the drawbridge.

"Well, I'm twenty-six."

"I shouldn't like you to be any other age. Not for anything."

Gillian, embarrassed and pleased by the earnest weight of his words, laughed to hide her feelings, then stopped short, ashamed. To behave like a silly girl—with that kind of dissimulation, *she*. . . How deep his eyes were! Why didn't he give her his arm, going up this steep little hill? She took it, half-defiantly, half-capriciously, then she was almost drawing away. It was as though somehow she had bared him . . . the sensitiveness of his touch went through her, she could feel it tingling in her fingers, alarmingly. She must do something, say something, give some direction to this, not let them both be at the mercy . . . taken aback. Her intellect, intensely conscious, rebelled against this emotional attack, so impertinently sprung upon her, and unfairly, so swerving her from her old lines and meditated action, bidding her "do as she was told," on the moment, with none of her wonted view of what she did or why she

did it. And it was not as though she were in love with this child, either. She liked him, liked very much his liking her.

"Tell me about yourself," she demanded with an imperative assertion summoned to her need. She was getting more used to his arm now, it was not quite so— "I wanted to know more about you. That's why I came this morning."

"Oh, I—well, that's just what I don't— There hasn't really been anything, you see—not anything important. Not till now. I suppose I've just gone on."

He spoke without any shyness, without marked hesitation. She had freed him of shyness, he was gratefully conscious of that. For an instant he thought of Frippie, but then she had freed him because she was so much less than he was, he saw that now. Gillian was so infinitely more, he had only to wait on her power, to rest in it . . . no need of anything but that.

"You only think so." They were at the top of the hill, by the steps that led down to the dry grassy moat. Alec released her arm, but at once took it again, took it afresh, as she felt, with a renewal, in disturbing difference, of that tremor. She drew from him, and then was exasperated with herself for being "coy." These "instinctive girlish movements"—really! "Most things that are important happen before you're nineteen," she went on in a common-sense tone. "Inside things, I mean."

"Oh, no."

He gave her the same wondering deep look. She

tried to clutch her excitement and scan it: she could not. There were beating wings in her. With head half-turned, she stood looking on the ground, as Alec was speaking. She heard him dimly; he was more decided than he had been before. She liked that. . . . It was with this boy's stepmother that Carlyon-Williams had run off; how queer. . . . He was assuring her that there *hadn't* been anything important, that nothing had happened, to count. . . . She knew what he meant—oh, he meant the usual "I never knew what it was to live till I met you!" She tried to feel cynical, she couldn't, it was all too sweet to her. But comedy broke into her exaltation when she reflected on her attitude—head turned, eyes averted, a Royal Academy picture of "First Love" or "A Meeting." She was not young enough to escape the ridiculousness of sex. In a half-resentful, half-humorous defiance of herself she argued that she wasn't posing, that it would have been a pose for her to have stood anyhow else. Then her mind stiffened, she resolved not to let herself go; she would think.

They found themselves walking down the narrow steps together, closely together, as, walking so, they had to be. He felt her hair against his cheek once, lightly. He realized her as neither tall nor short; a head shorter than he, perhaps. He was much more contained and sure than he could have believed he could be: all ungainliness was gone, he had to follow in the line of her poise and grace, to take their suggestions. How she helped him! Again his reflection was grateful: he thought of the rude challenge, the

gross insistence of the emotions that Frippie had made in him—their evasions of promise, their false starts and empty conclusions. What there had been was so little, contenting for a time because he didn't know, but what virtue or meaning had those satisfactions held? And when he had reached for more, there had been nothing. No lying intimations, now—there would be everything endlessly—clear joy and understanding.

"Why did you take me down here?" She spoke with forced lightness, relieving the importance of their silence.

"Did I?"

They stood on the last step. Gillian looked up. There was nothing but Tower and sky, they were walled in. Her heart seemed to be beating in strong little waves that broke in her throat. Why had she allowed this, and, having allowed it, why was she agitated, almost frightened—frightened of nothing? She had to make an effort not to tremble. Alec realized with bewildering suddenness that she was standing facing him, with her back to the high wall of the moat.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "We're here, anyhow!" She gave him one of her racing looks. "No, stay where you are. I want to see— Take your hat off, I like your hair." She told herself defiantly that she would say anything she chose, she invoked arrogance to her rescue from this disconcerting stress. But it was extraordinarily difficult to say anything that wouldn't sound either pointless for them or coquettish

or utterly bald. "Well? We are two ridiculous people!" She laughed, and put her hands up behind her head, lifting her chin a little.

"Why are we? *You* aren't."

Alec stopped, held by the new look of her throat—the look that her raising and turning of her chin had given him. He moved to her under the impulse of that unfamiliar straining curve, that delicate tightening of the pale olive flesh.

"You're wonderful." He was close to her, he spoke low. "I don't know—I didn't know that any one could be so—"

"Oh, I'm not! You can't really—I mean you don't know at all!"

Her arms dropped, she wavered before him. His look of utmost conviction shamed her words. That religious look of a devotee, it was absorbingly new to her, yet not new, she had in some sort known it. It was terrible that he should be so sure, that his youth should do this to him: it was terrible, and great. That strong eagerness of his mouth, his eyes so darkly lit, his boyish candour, all his unknowing boldness . . . she could have dropped at his feet and humbled herself to him for ever. No other way to hold fast by that tenderness and passion. He could subdue her, this boy who seemed to be at her will.

"I want you!" he whispered. "You can't tell how much—I must—"

"But what?" She held out her hands, and he caught them, burning her though.

"It's not like anything I've ever—it's because—"

Oh, I—I love you! May I say that, do you mind? do you?”

Her mouth shook, she waited for him to say it again.

“May I kiss you?”

The girl of twenty-six was wholly taken by that question which no one but a novice can ever ask. The contrast of his diffidence and humility and restraint with the overpowering and momentous compulsion that drove from him, so sure in his mouth and eyes, confirmed her his. She did not answer, she looked hard, then she kissed him, and stayed.

In that chaste transfiguration of flesh they were lifted, they flew in gold light, in a brightness that turned Time and all else black, made all else nothing. In the quivering expanse of their fused selves lightning shook, waves of far strange air swept on their unison, moulding it in light and heat, creating it as a third thing, a new being, apart entirely from the cast-off mortalities that lay shrivelled from them, forgotten. They clasped this new life, transubstantiated flesh and soul in their sacrament.

When she left his arms, he had part in her still, she being of him still when they sat with hands that clung for full remembrance, full assurance of a possession that no heavier physical stamp had blurred, no stamp of Nature's material will. He spoke her name then for the first time. “Gillian!” Over and again he said it: “Gillian—dear—my Gillian.” Her looks for him now were from stilled eyes, eyes that had known and rested in the event. She was

pale, her mouth no less than her eyes seemed changed, there was a new severance of her lips.

"What is it, dear?" he asked anxiously, mistaking for suffering her look of desire to suffer.

"You do love me? You are sure?"

"I always shall!"

He touched her soft mutinous hair, kissed her mouth, her mouth only. He was no practised satiated lover, to dally with her neck and throat. She was in swirl of feelings that she could not face in any free regard for what they were: all her instinct battled against the admission of them to her conscious thought. She could but strive feebly for the honesty in which she had such pride, she could only think: "And I'm modern!" Could any woman be modern when it came to this? This resonance of the mouths of ancient powers and glories. . . . His hair and forehead pressed to her. . . .

"No, Alec!" She tightened his hand. "Not now. I can't, I—"

She was afraid. He felt a shiver pass through her, into him.

"Gillian. You are happy, aren't you?"

"Am I? I must be—I don't know— You moved in my heart. All that time, you—"

"You did in mine! But you're trembling, again. Why?"

"I can't help it. I suppose it's a—a sort of wind of love." She bit her lip, ashamed. "What are we to do, Alec? We don't know what to do!"

"Oh, I never could have thought—" He looked

white and spent. "I didn't dare, Gillian. It seemed too wonderful, I couldn't even think it, do you know? We're—we're each other's, aren't we, always?"

"'Always!'" Her voice broke. "Oh, Alec, if only you weren't so young—if I wasn't— It isn't fair. You're seven years younger." Gillian summoned her strayed forces. She clutched at the reaction which seemed for the moment to give her the chance for the honesty which that intellectual conscience of hers demanded. She tried not to feel his hand. "Have you thought just what that means?"

"But I told you, dearest, that—" His dark eyes were on her in anxious surprise.

"I know. I know you did." She saw how eagerly the sun played with his hair. "But you won't think so in five years' time—or less—Alec."

"I'll *always* think so, you know I will. How could I love any of these *young* girls like you? They're stupid. You're only teasing."

"Perhaps you couldn't, now. You'll be twenty-three when I'm thirty. Nothing can ever get us away from that."

She did not wince, but stiffened, under her cruelty to herself. She was of Father Collett's blood. But she could not speak her torturing thoughts further, could not say: "And when *you're* thirty—a middle-aged woman!" Instead, she had to think: "After all, I shouldn't look middle-aged, I'm sure I shouldn't."

"You might get tired of me," she went on, "you would—"

"Tired of *you?* Why, Gillian dear, you must *know*—"

"Well, but—" There was no arguing with the boy's indignant amaze, but again her reason caught Gillian, caught her in stiffening breeze, billowing out the sails of her theories. "It always happens, it's the way things are. . . . Did you ever read '*Mademoiselle de Maupin*'?"

"No. I've read some of de Maupassant." He said that so hopefully, so much as though he had done the next best thing, that Gillian for the brief moment could have kissed him in simple affection. "How well you speak French!"

"I suppose I ought to. The girl in that book—she leaves the man after they've loved each other for one—for one day."

"I say! Gillian! You're not going to—" He pleaded, alarmed. "You—you do like me!"

"You know I *like* you. Yes, I suppose so!" She gave a laugh that ran light and shining, child to her voice and eyes. Those sails of theory collapsed quite. For her to lecture him from the text of "*Mademoiselle de Maupin*"!

"I never have loved any one at all before!" He flushed over his spent look.

"Neither have I!" It was true, in an even deeper sense than Alec's assertion. Gillian had the fastidiousness often found with passionate temperaments that are joined to active minds. "And I want you to love me, Alec, I do, I do! There!"

She lay yielding in the assurance of his arms. That

first violent shaking transcendence was gone from them now, they rested together in sweet armistice, they were nearer to one another because further from their passion. Gillian felt that her closed lids burnt blue, not red. He kissed her lips, but more tenderly, more consciously. These were not moments of that first huge surge and crash, they did not break so far beyond, they were moments that would come back to surer remembrance. . . . His embrace grew more close, it began to challenge what they had, it flushed her surrender with deeper colour. She had to refuse, to resist; she left him.

"Alec," she said. "Oh, I wonder what will happen to us? It seems so much as if you couldn't tell!"

"We'll marry, of course!"

"Will we?" She stopped, and looked troubled, almost sad.

"Then we'll always be together—always—and every one will know!" He spoke triumphantly, proudly. "When people are in love, they always marry, don't they? Unless—"

He broke off, blushing, remembering Gillian's "advanced opinions," wondering. He had not thought of them since seeing her, and their association with her now seemed terribly indelicate. Father Collett's feelings about marriage did not so much as graze him, neither then nor later.

"Oh, I don't know!"

Gillian was harassed. She found herself wanting to get Alec to talk of Doreen, she wanted to know if there had been anything between them, anything at

all. She was consumingly anxious for him to say something that would put Doreen far below her. How unworthy this was, she thought, how mean! She rejected her wish. Marriage. . . . She knew what she ought, in that intellectual honesty of hers, to say, but she couldn't—not to this boy who loved her, whom she— She felt wicked, now. Her natural conscience seemed to be working against her intellectual wickedness. She found it equally difficult to live up to her theories or to her desires. "How atavistic I am!" she thought. "It's absurd." Then with blinding clearness she saw that the real temptation—for she had money enough—was to take him and marry him and keep him as long as she could. This, as she saw it, was the real immorality that beckoned her.

"I couldn't marry you yet, of course." He spoke with a grave young dignity, terribly touching to her. "We could wait a little, we'd be seeing each other all the time." The thought of Mervyn and Nita crossed him, but he instantly dismissed them. "Oh, it would be, it'd be simply—!"

"Well, then we'd certainly—we'd know better. No, Alec—let me think."

She sat, drawn up away from him, looking steadily to the far side of the moat. She tried to seek refuge on the familiar ground of her "views." If she attacked marriage now, to him, it would be out of sheer virtue! She thought of the affair of his stepmother, but that was too near him, and too near her: she shrank from any allusion almost as wincingly as he did. And how could she talk—talk—after this!

Phrases of the articles she had written, the speeches she had made at meetings of "Women Workers" came to her. She felt ashamed of them. They were pedantic, inky, priggish, absurd. If she said them now, how dreadfully ashamed she'd be—and it would stop him loving her, she knew it would! He took her hand, took shyly the fingers only.—"Marriage a gross advertisement of purely private relations." Her thoughts went on. "Because two people wish to be bound for ever in a moment of abnormal excitement, that's no excuse for Society's taking a base advantage of them." "Husband and wife can't be lovers, unless they're terribly unimaginative, dull, placid people." "Economic independence of women the real solution." "Money conditions made marriage, and change of money conditions will break it."—Spectacled phrases! How watery all these words looked, how hollow they sounded, how small they were in the face of this great thing that she and he had felt! When he held her, she'd have married him for a thousand years, sooner than have lost him for a moment. . . . "Abnormal excitement"—as if a pale phrase like that came near it! All the same her brain would keep beating unconvinced, beating hard: she had to hear that all this was "glamour." Well, even if it were, why should she know? She wouldn't know now, she wouldn't spoil— What if it couldn't last? Perhaps it would. Anyhow, she didn't care. And she wouldn't say a word to him . . . theories of marriage. . . .

"What's the matter, dear? What are you thinking about?" Alec, suspecting that her look embraced more than him, was jealous. He quickened to her, burned to recall her to himself. They were losing time—terribly.

"Oh, that I was born a little too late, that's all. Even though you were born later!"

"Do come to me, dear. Please—Gillian—"

"Not now." All she could think, then, was in her wish for him to take her again, but the very strength of the wish made the decision of her refusal. "No, not now, I mean it!" He felt her little nerve-ridden hand quiver on his protesting mouth. He looked at her, lovingly reproachful, and again that eager dark tenderness of his eyes shot through her. Ah, she must keep him now—any way—just for a little! "Alec!" she exclaimed, with a sudden change of tone, astonishing to him. "If you did stop loving me, I wouldn't keep you—I wouldn't—not if you—" Tears rushed wantonly on her, she turned away.

"Why should we think about what won't ever happen? Oh, Gillian!" He took her, turning her to him, with a violence overpoweringly sweet to the relaxing girl. Her eyes, larger and softer with their tears, were lovelier to him than ever. "You mustn't talk like this, you mustn't—you mustn't think—"

"Well!" She broke from her yielding to his kiss. "It's a pity I'm not seventeen. I shouldn't talk like that then, and you'd be fairly caught!" Her laugh was insecure.

"I want to be!"

"Oh, Alec—please. I said not, before. You don't care what I say!"

"But why?"

"Oh, I don't know!" She was afraid of his not wanting to be with her again, not wanting it quite so much. "We must go. Tell me: when can you come to London?"

"Oh, as soon as—in a day or two, I'll come!"

"Here's my address." She gave him a card. "You'll telephone?" She blushed deeply, she was heavily struck by shame. "I will, I will," she told herself, rebelling.

"Yes, could I come tomorrow?" To Alec the blush meant a new lustre and flash for her eyes.

"No; the end of the week. 'Tomorrow'!" She teased his comically instant dejection. "I oughtn't to see you there at all!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, because my great-great-great-grandmother tells me not to! I don't care, though. You aren't sentimental about money, Alec, are you?" she added, determined to resist her ancestress further. She leaned capriciously, and gave him a light unexpected kiss. "Was it yesterday we first met? At least our acquaintance has 'ripened rapidly,' you'll admit." Her eyes went shimmering. Alec was reminded of Father Collett's vivid changes of mood.

"And we are engaged, aren't we, Gillian?"

"Oh, we'll talk about that next time!" Then:

"Look up!" she said, in a low distinct tone of no emotion.

He looked. The wall behind them was surmounted by the incensed face of his father.

"What is the meaning, sir, of this performance?"

"I'll go," Alec whispered, pressing her hand.
"Wait for me; please wait."

CHAPTER XVII

GILLIAN did not ponder her interruption of the altercation between father and son: it sprang from her sense of indignity in being left alone "down there," from her more urgent sense of Alec's inexperience needing her protection, and from the rapid-growing violence of her impatience. After three minutes it seemed as though he and his father would go on talking for ever. Some of the first words she could hear: "Go away!" and "You'd better not!" from Alec: "I will not have it, sir!" then, less distinctly, as they moved from the moat: "... any more immorality, in my family." "If you don't go, I'll." ... Then only their voices reached her strained hearing, and the moments lengthened. Infinite values wavered in them. ... She must leave that place, she'd be sunk there. As she got up, her consciousness snapped under a sudden stroke of black, the ground swam against her; she held herself tightly, driving her feet down. Then, released, she gained the steps of the moat, rapidly climbing them, checking herself when the wall no longer concealed her.

Mr. Glaive, who stood facing the moat, saw her first. He stared, blinked, broke the sentence he was in, broke the change of posture that he had been about to make. He held ground, wary at once. Alec, turning, exclaimed with dropping mouth.

"Mr. Glaive." Gillian spoke at once, not looking at Alec. "Could you give me a lift back to Malstowe? If you'd be so kind—?"

Glaive, annoyed that he had not done so before,—it would have been the correct thing,—raised his hat, elaborating the gesture. "I am at your service, of course." He was delighted by his own restraint, by the fine pitch of his formality: the word "breeding" caressed him.

"Thank you so much. I saw you had your car. If I walked back I'm afraid I might be late. I'm meeting the Burkes, you see."

"Gillian!" Alec broke in with an indignant vehemence that pressed on her hard. "Won't you tell him about us, why won't you—?"

"Did you ride or walk here, Alec?" she asked him.

"I can't tell him—not properly. I thought you'd come to help me!"

"Motor-cycle," said Mr. Glaive, with a sideways glance at her.

"Where did you leave it, then?"

"Gillian, I don't— He doesn't understand, he's got it all wrong, I do think you might—"

"I don't see any cycle." She looked inquiringly.

"He left it at 'The Seven Mariners.'" Mr. Glaive jerked his thumb in the direction of the tavern.

"Oh, well, that's all right. As your father is being good enough to take me— It's a two-seater, isn't it? I'm so sorry, but I'm rather late already. Do you mind—?"

Alec relapsed, confounded, as they walked toward the car. How could she? What did she mean? Ah, she would tell his father when they were driving, that was it, of course! What would she say? He wanted to be there, he ought to be there. It was awful, being left out like this, it seemed a sort of trick. What would she say? He must know—

“Well, Alec, will you crank her up?”

The boy started, he looked at Gillian in appeal, but she would not catch his eye. “Oh, then it’s not a self-starter,” she said.

“No; quite an old car. Does for rough work about the country, though.”

Mr. Glaive’s tone was guardedly good humoured. “A clever minx,” he thought. He would like to tell her so, in the right way, in a man-of-the-world way. She was certainly pretty.

Alec cranked. The operation spelt out the memory of Matcham’s meeting for him, spelt it slowly, painfully. He wrestled with that impertinent recall to dead emotions. But had his father won again, now? No, he hadn’t, he never could! It wasn’t right, though, that he should be taking Gillian, it looked as though. . . . Why had she done that? “If he hadn’t come, I should be with her alone still, we could have walked back to Malstowe together.” Alec kindled against his father, but in a moment his anger disappeared in the saturation of his loss. She was leaving him. If only he could make his father understand, or if only his father would go, not be there, that was all he asked, he’d forgive him anything then.

Absorbed as he was, adolescent as he was, he did not for a moment reflect on or take pride in the girl's spirit, her address. She puzzled him, and he was almost resentful.

Gillian waved her hand, smiled: they drove off. His gaze clung to her slight shoulders, her fez-shaped hat with its blowing tassel, blowing with the curl of her hair, her arm that rested along the edge of the car, her hand that just showed, but now he had lost it. His father ought not to be sitting by her, so near as that, nobody ought! She receded, leaving him in exile. He must be with her, always, he could not bear this, her absence rent him, how could it be borne? That parting seemed to be for ever, he felt that it was for ever, he was convinced, hopelessly, of an eternal severance between them. Absolute certainty of seeing her again was what he demanded; anything less than that was tragically insecure. And there were a hundred things that could happen to cut them apart. Suppose she met with some accident, suppose he did— He wished he had not taken Mervyn's motor-cycle, he must ride it very carefully. How distant she was now. Could it be so lately that he had—could he have ever held so close that distant figure? When she was with him she had taken off her hat: he could not remember when, could not remember her doing it . . . her hair. . . .

Something fluttered from the car, something white. Paper, it looked like paper . . . a message from her. He ran. It might blow away, blow out to sea, be lost. Everything seemed like that—in danger. In a

fever of doubt and insecurity he raced on: he couldn't see the white thing, he was not even sure where it had dropped. It might be that everything depended on his finding it. He felt more and more certain that if he didn't find it he would never see Gillian again. His present loss of her outlined all her values, it deepened them, set him fast in them. Sudden as it had come, and stronger for another's part in it, it blew cold on the boy's molten metal which it hardened to a weight that stayed. He ran unslackingly, with searching eyes. . . . What if she had been snatched from him? Suppose his father were talking to her now, arguing with her, trying to keep her away, to get her to promise? Then he would kill him. There would be no difficulty then, any way would do, wouldn't matter—not if his father had done that. But Gillian wouldn't promise, she couldn't. . . . He insisted on this, falteringly, feeling that he ought to have no doubt.

There it was, the white thing! To the side of the road, not far ahead, against a telegraph-pole. Alec ran faster. But it wasn't paper. . . . Ah! he understood, she had let it drop for him, so that he would have something that belonged to her, so that he would know that she—what they called a "token." He thought of a Latin phrase of his recent schooldays: "*pignus amoris*"—"pledge of love"—a pledge. He was exalted by delight and joy. This was a message better than writing—it was just the assurance he craved—something of hers—for him.

He halted by the telegraph-pole, stooped, half

blinded, reaching down with hands that tingled and shook. In a passion of tender reverence, he took the token up. It was his father's handkerchief, a particularly nice clean silk one, for Sunday.

CHAPTER XVIII

WILFRED VAIL, half an hour later, was arrested in the middle of one of his leisurely engagements by the plugging of a motor-cycle. The sound advanced, turned up the longer one of the two converging drives that led to his house. Vail's wide nostrils gave a slight brisk flutter of expectation. A new engine for him to examine: excellent. He dispatched, shortly, the affair he was in. A new engine: he could tell that at once, for the voice of each motor of the neighbourhood was distinguishable to him. He did not speculate for a moment about this particular motor-cycle's accidental human attachment.

Alec was slowing down at the end of the drive as his friend emerged from the familiar little one-story annex which stood modestly out from the low white-brick house, enhancing its air of pleasant amplitude.

"Why, it's *you*, Alec! Where did you get the cycle?"

"Oh, it's Mervyn's."

"You've never taken it here before." Vail's tone was somewhat aggrieved. "Let's have a look at it. Lord, what a state it's in! You can't keep a motor-cycle any cleaner than you keep your fountain-pen. What a messy person you are! I shall have to spend most of the afternoon on this." He took his spec-

tacles off, wiped his face, and looked reproachfully at Alec with his pale large blue eyes that shone watery in the sun. "You aren't looking well, either," he said, a shade severely. "Come on, for God's sake let's get out of this glare.—What have you been up to?"

"Oh, nothing particular—" Alec leaned the cycle against the wall.

Wilfred remembered the stepmother's elopement; the motor-cycle had quite put it out of his mind. Of course that accounted for the odd look Alec had had under his scrutiny. They hadn't met since. Poor boy, it must have been a shock—of course—disturbing. He took his arm, with intimate pressure. "I'd been expecting you now you were home again," he said. "I've been thinking about you a lot, Alec. You know that."

The boy hardly heard him. He was overwhelmed by the strangeness of being here in this known place, with this known friend. It was life in the past; some self of his that was gone had been in that life. . . . He was remote: yet all the while the force of Wilfred, the force of the scene, were insistent, persuading him of the continuity of the time spent in that place, in that friendship, since and now. It was as though the reality, the existence of Gillian were being challenged. She hadn't been here. It was like the playing of some stratagem upon him. Alec's new eyes unsurely disputed the sceptical, indifferent, yet positive claim that these habitual vistas made on his vision.

They went into the house together, still silent. Wilfred sat down and began rolling himself a very thin cigarette; the tip of his tongue showed red against his beard as he licked the paper. There was the same picture of Hamlet with the skull, in its long frame . . . that picture seen so often through poised clouds of tobacco smoke, at winter midnights. . . . New Year's Eve. Since Alec was fifteen he had spent New Year's with Wilfred. Memories drove up thick, the boy stared at them. It was inexplicable that he should have never even seen her then, and that yet, now, he was here.

"Poor Alec," Wilfred was thinking, "this thing has evidently hit him pretty hard." "Will you smoke?" he said.

"Thanks." Alec took a yellow Russian cigarette from the extended case. "I haven't smoked today."

"Why this outburst of virtue?"

Alec flushed under his friend's mild incurious glance. "I didn't happen to think of it," he said truthfully.

Looking out of the window, he was caught by the glint of the conservatory roof in the sun.—Frippie's grapes.—Another thing he had not happened to think of. Disconcerted, he shut down against Frippie. He wished he had not kissed her.

"I say, Alec." Wilfred saw that there would be no ease between them until the matter came to surface. "There's nothing I can say or do to help, of course, but I feel with you. You understand that, don't you?"

"But how—? I don't see." Alec blushed more deeply. "I don't see how on earth you can know!"

"Oh, my dear boy, Suffolk gossip! Why, things get about in five minutes—"

"'Five minutes'!" Alec echoed him in consternation. He had grotesque visions of spies and couriers.

"Don't let's talk about it if you don't want to." Wilfred looked at his watch. "Lunch will be soon. Lunch, and stout. Good stout, too, since the war really ended."

"I want to talk about it. That's why I came. Have you seen her? I didn't—"

"'Seen her'?" Wilfred's mathematical mind tried to cope with the question. "I suppose you mean since—"

"No, no; at any time?"

"Ah!" It flashed upon Wilfred Vail that what Alec meant was, had he ever seen Mrs. Glaive so comport herself as to suggest that she might be a light woman. Really, Alec was very elliptical. "No, I never have," he replied decisively. "I shouldn't be much of a judge, though."

"Oh, I thought you must have—because of what you said about feeling with me. Look here, Wilfred," he went on hurriedly, "I don't know who told you or what they said, but it's all absolutely different from anything I've ever felt before—*absolutely*."

"Yes, yes." Wilfred pulled his chair round to the boy. He took his hand. "I *know*. But these things—one feels them most awfully at the time, but after a while one adapts oneself. It becomes less important,

you see, by degrees one feels it less; and much sooner than you could have believed, you get over it."

"I never shall!"

"Naturally that's how it seems, now. But—well, you'll see. The best thing you can do is to keep your mind off it, all you can."

"Keep my mind off it!"

"Certainly. Thinking about it won't help. The thing's done. Worrying over it won't bring her back."

"Oh, you heard about everything." Alec winced. "But I'll get her back. I'll go to her."

"I shouldn't. After all, that's your father's affair, and he—"

"It's not his affair! I won't stand him interfering, I've made up my mind!"

Wilfred Vail stared at him. "Those modern ideas," he gently deprecated. "Surely—I may be dreadfully conservative—but your father being married to her, you see—"

"Oh! Good Lord, *that*. Why, that wasn't it at all!"

"What the devil is it, then?"

"I thought, when you said—I thought you'd heard somehow about—about Gillian."

"Gillian? Who in heaven's name is Gillian?—Well, I'll be—" he noted Alec's expression. "I'll be damned if you're not in love! So *that's* all it is! That's all that's wrong with you. My dear child—my dear—" Wilfred leaned his head well back, and laughed loudly. "Alec in love!" He gurgled.

His mirth shook his beard, shook his spectacles. "Really, Alec—" He gasped, straightening himself. "I suppose I ought not to, it's partly because I know you so well, you see." Alec's look of utter disgust was too much for him, he leaned back again, committing himself fully to the irrepressible hilarity of the situation. "My dear Alec—" He wiped his eyes, recovering. "You mustn't look so indignant, it makes me worse. There's something about a man in love, you see, that's irresistibly funny, just as there is about a man with a bilious attack. You mightn't think it, but I really can sympathize with you. I've had bilious attacks."

"You've never really been in love, you can't have. You can't have *cared*—properly—"

"Oh, yes, I have. Why, once, that time when I was up at the Music College, I wrote verses to one of them. I went further, I bought her a wrist-watch, used to hang about jewellers' shops for hours. It's true I thought better of it and kept the wrist-watch for myself. Here it is! I wish you'd been in London with me then. You missed a lot of entertainment."

"I shouldn't have laughed at you!"

"Oh, yes, you would. It's too late now. Now I intend to be thoroughly middle-aged. Much more convenient. Since I took up with a beard and spectacles, Mrs. Vail is frequently mistaken for my wife. Come on, let's go and wash. There's no bell. Mrs. Vail has gone gadding off to Bournemouth." He not only always alluded to his mother as "Mrs. Vail," but he so addressed her. It was a part of the for-

mality that kept the corners of their domestic life rounded and smooth. "She's taken Mrs. Leech with her and given the others a holiday. I'm grubbing along with the boy. Just what I like, as you know. The ritual of the household is thoroughly wasteful both of time and labour. It's peculiarly the sphere of woman, and in it she shows peculiarly well her inherent lack of method and love of display. The barbaric, as opposed to the businesslike. A wholesome reminder for you, my dear boy. Come on. Timothy will have put something cold on the table. You can tell me all about her while we're getting fed."

Alec's resentment cooled as they walked up the familiar stairway. Those lurking influences kept creeping back on him. . . . There was Wilfred's bed, without sheets, as always, and with the pillows piled high on account of his nervous heart, so that it shouldn't "drop beats." They had sat together on that bed, watching the dawn come. "The dawn with silver-sandalled feet," Wilfred had quoted. Alec had never seen that there was anything in poetry before. How was it that Wilfred couldn't understand now? The boy, as he washed his hands and face, wondered. It struck him that Wilfred and his experiences with Wilfred were really much closer to what he felt now than anything else in his life. For it was Wilfred who had first touched his sense of beauty, first made it conscious, given him perception, shown him the romantic urgency of visible things. No one had influenced him anything like as much, before Gillian

came. He had brought things to life—words of poetry, the look of the night sky, the pulse of music, everything that she now contained, that passed now in intenser flow to him through her, his only medium. . . .

“Why have you given up playing, Wilfred?”

“Oh, you can’t play without practice. I don’t want to degenerate into an amateur. And you know my poor dear health won’t let me be an artist.”

“Are you *really* interested in all this motoring stuff?”

“Of course I am. Hurry up. What with your being in love and not getting my lunch I shall begin to blaspheme horribly in a moment. Do *dry* your hands. I never saw anything like the laboured inadequacy of the way you pat them. I wish I could make a first-rate mechanic of you, Alec. When Teddy—my good doctor—told me without any beating about the bush that if I didn’t chuck my sedentary nerve-exhausting life I’d go off in a year, that settled it. It’s a mistake, physically, to be born when your father’s nearly seventy.” He took Alec’s arm and led him out of the room. “Why, you know the only decent thing I ever composed—that Mass they played at the Oratory—what did that mean? No proper sleep for a month—I got so that I couldn’t stir out of the house without—you know.” He shivered. “Teddy suggested some open-air hobby—hard physical work and not a hint of nerve-strain. Wise man. Now I sleep nine hours every night and have the nerves of a bricklayer. Try the same cure, it might work with *you*. Ah. *Lunch*.” They sat down.

"Yes, I know. It was extraordinary how you changed everything, so suddenly."

"Oh, I'd always had a sneaking interest in mechanics. Music and mechanics are quite near together, really." He deftly carved the cold roast beef. "It's simply the practical instead of the emotional application of the same forces. Not so difficult, Alec, not such a wrench to exchange counterpoint and trilling on sixths for cardan shafts and cantilever springs. There's mathematical instinct comes in for both, but in mechanics it's entirely detached, it's cold and clear and impersonal: it leaves you alone. Music wants your life-blood, damn her, music won't be content without raping you body and soul. Too much of a good thing, at least for me it is.—Do you know why musicians are nearly always cold and sensual? They haven't anything left over for love."

"That must be why you don't understand." Alec took his chance.

"Don't understand what?"

"About me—and—"

"Oh, I see. You and—what was her name?"

"Gillian." Alec bent his head over his plate.

"Ah, yes. That's to the point. Nature or Life or whatever you choose to call it is playing a—well, let's call it a Fugue on you. You're in the score; the score is you, in fact."

"And her."

"Oh, of course one has to have some sort of a theme! The point is that musicians aren't often used

like that. It's a case of two of a trade, you see; trade-jealousy comes in. When a musician does fall in love, he does bad work at once; sheer spite on Nature's part, I call it. I know when I was making that particular kind of fool of myself, my work went to pieces. We don't make good lovers, either, from the woman's point of view. They like the usual man—the Philistine."

Alec resolved to be unimpeachably normal, he hoped he was a Philistine.

"There's no doubt an artist ought to avoid marriage. What a fate for a man of genius! Breadwinner for wife and babes!"

"Well, I'm not an artist."

"Luckily marriage isn't practicable for you yet, Alec."

"Not at once, perhaps." The observation annoyed the boy extremely. "It may be—soon."

"'Soon'!"

"Why not?"

"Because you're nineteen. And you aren't either a prince or a peasant."

"I could be engaged, anyhow."

"I hope you're not going to tell me you *are*."

"Well, not exactly. I shall know when I see her again."

"I suppose she's one of those young things one sees about with hair in tails down their backs? Thin tails of hair and tight backs and school straw hats with monogrammed ribbons." He groaned.

"She isn't young. Not like that." Alec felt extremely glad that she wasn't. "She's twenty-six," he announced proudly.

"What! Well, she ought to know better, then. Her age doesn't at all reassure me, Alec. In fact, I find her age rather alarming. Everything depends on her, of course. She might go kidnapping you. . . . Has she money? Who is she?"

"She's Father Collett's niece."

"Worse and worse. All the Colletts are well off, I believe. You've taken away some of my appetite, Alec. *Yours*, I notice, is fairly hearty. A sign of hope, perhaps."

"I never knew you were against marriage."

"Why should I be? I'm not married, and very grateful I am for the immense advantages that gives me. I regard bachelorhood as the privilege of the level-headed few. As long as marriage isn't compulsory— I'm very much against marriage for *you*, naturally. I don't have to tell you I'm fond of you, Alec." His eyes lighted with that peculiar sincerity and singleness of affection often found in men who are not romantically controlled and who take the compensating drive of their sensuality too easily and openly to be harassed or embittered by it. "I don't want you to be grabbed by a girl—not yet, anyhow. Later on, of course—well, it's one of those unpleasant things you have to expect, when the time comes."

"But we'd always be friends—just the same."

"Some hundreds of millions of people have made that remark before you, dear boy, and found out their

mistake." Wilfred finished his glass of stout. "Of course there's one advantage in marrying a girl with money. You can afford to live separately later on. I'm quite sure that hadn't occurred to you—"

"No, it hadn't!"

"I thought not. Be grateful to me, then, for a new idea. Let me see.—Yes, take some tart, I'll go on to cheese. Twenty-six—nineteen. I don't think she'll do it. If she were over thirty, she might. Hardly at twenty-six. No, she'd have to be over thirty or under twenty for you to be in any real danger. I feel better now. I'll have another glass of stout."

In Wilfred's Study afterwards, Alec came tentatively to the main purpose of his visit. The approach was difficult, because Wilfred asked none of the usual questions about Gillian. Alec was piqued because his friend betrayed not the smallest curiosity about her appearance or character, did not inquire where they had met, how, or how often. Instead, he talked of the coming Elections, he made Alec tell him of Matcham's meeting and Mr. Glaive's intervention. He had heard fantastic and contradictory rumours that he was anxious to be able to explain and correct. He spoke at length on the threatened economic revolution.

"These people can't win," he declared. "All they can do is to get higher wages, but anything that cuts deeper than that—no. I've mixed a lot with working people lately, here and in London. When it comes to any scheme for taking away the money and power from those who have it, they get suspicious at once.

They feel certain *they* won't get the money, you see, and their idea is that the agitators will. Did you hear what old Bob Haken said to Matcham? 'Ah, 'bor, an' yu'll spend it, tu; du yu wouldn' goo a-gittin' on it outer *them*. Better his owd lordship had it than yu.' That's it exactly." He spoke with satisfaction, he was conservative to the bone, though without a single one of the conservative illusions. His was the unshakeable conservatism of the sceptic.

Alec, in spite of the divided mind that he brought to his recital of events on the Green, could not help being struck by Wilfred's evident distaste for Matcham. When he came to the phrase that had so obstinately lodged in his brain, his friend caught him up.

"'Brute gods,' " he repeated, shortly and coldly. "No doubt. And no doubt he puts up better ones—in his mind. What's the good of that to the world? Once let him and the other fools get started on the practical construction work, and their new gods will either dance off into mist or they'll change and be just as 'brutish' as the old ones."

"I say—" Alec felt that this interruption had relieved him from the obligation of continuing his account. "I didn't tell you that—I mean to say Gillian's going back to London tonight."

"Oh, is she? I'm rather sorry. These things often last longer when there's separation. Much better bring it to a head at once. The amount of energy wasted on this 'reconstruction' talk makes me sick. All any sensible man needs to do is to take condi-

tions as they are and make what he can of them. He can break the rules if necessary, but he won't waste his time trying to alter them or talking about breaking them, either."

"Well, that was all my stepmother did—broke the rules—"

Alec strove, bewildered.—Pieces of a puzzle that wouldn't fit—all this, and the assertive memories of the place, of Wilfred: while outside of it all was his determination for Gillian, like a sort of hard funnel through which everything that came to his mind had to go.

"My dear boy,"—Wilfred had paused—"you know me well enough to know that I'm not morally indignant about Mrs. Glaive. I'm only sorry for the break as it affects you, just as I should be sorry if you were hurt by any other natural accident. Where you have marriage you have the other thing. It's curious when you think of it,"—he stared meditatively, stroking his beard—"how much finer, as a word, 'adultery' is than 'marriage.' Well. I'm no more indignant with the one than I am with the other. Take the world as it is, Alec, take the world as it is."

He leaned back, profoundly unmoral in his complete and impartial acceptance of the moralities together with every one of their logical implications. He had spoken in utter sincerity, too, of "breaking the rules," out of an individualism which struck from the same root as his conservatism: an individualism that was prepared, on need, to run full tilt at any law or any convention, without abating politic and

general support of law and convention by one jot.

"I don't quite know when I shall be able to see her again, of course." Alec carried off the observation by striking a match.

"No, I suppose you don't. That move of your father's was really wonderfully well timed. That'll keep them quiet for a bit, I'll warrant."

"I wanted to go up to London this week."

"Yes; well, why not? Lord Yetminster had a perfect right, of course. But I don't like to think of those men tramping all the way round, day after day; I know three or four of them quite well. And besides, as your father saw—"

"Perhaps I shall go Tuesday—or Wednesday."

"Ah! Lord Yetminster usually gets what he wants. Remember that tussle he had with Sir Hugh? Dicky Podd told me. 'Th' owd Squire he went ahid hully wunnerful. I dunno what he worn't a-goin' ter du. But du yu howd hard there.—When last come last he couldn' du narthin' along o' his lordship. Th' owd Squire, he had to set right quiet like a duzzy fule. Ah, 'bor, yu may be quiet and quite a fule.' But no doubt your father—"

"I say, Wilfred! You see it's this way, I simply must get up to London—"

"Motor or train? That reminds me, you know I haven't had a look at that cycle of yours yet. I should say there's two hours' solid overhauling work ahead of us, by the look of it."

"Look here, wait a second." Alec reddened

furiously, rushing his words. "I haven't money to get to London and I must go."

"For how long?" Wilfred asked placidly.

"Oh—just for a day."

"Better make it a week. A day would be too risky. Twenty pounds would carry you through a week, travel expenses included, I suppose!" Himself the most frugal of men, never guilty of any extravagance except in buying tools for his motor workshop, Wilfred Vail ran riot in the excess of his estimates of other people's expenditures, especially in travelling by train and staying away from home. He never did either of these things himself. Between Suffolk and a suburb of London where his mother had another house, he invariably motored. "Well?"

"Oh, *easily*." Alec had been too delightedly taken aback to reply at once.

"The *Motor Review* people sent me eighteen pounds odd yesterday for articles. So I actually have something in the Bank, which is lucky or unlucky for you as the case may be. You shall have a cheque for twenty pounds three shillings and sevenpence." He took out one of the four fountain-pens that he carried—all of them always in perfect order, always with nibs that shone. "Did you know that your small change fell out of your trouser-pocket on to my chair last time you were here? When you're married, you must be more careful. Three and seven. I'd bought myself a small present with it already, and you'd never have got it back if it hadn't been for this cheque

that I'm writing you now. 'Alexander'? I suppose 'Alexander' is correct, but how very *odd*."

"I say—you know— It really is awfully—thanks awfully."

"If you've made up your mind to be a fool, you see, nothing can stop you. And if the worst comes to the worst, you can pay me back out of the allowance she makes you. Then I shall buy a new lathe. I've been hesitating over it for some time, but your marriage will make me reckless." He handed over the cheque, and Alec, with a beating heart, surveyed the familiar small neat clear handwriting. "The stub will be a memento. The stub will often amuse me."

"I'll—I'll write to you from London."

"Yes, send me a sonnet or two, do. And now for that filthy cycle of yours. You've no idea how much better it will run. . . . Oil and grease," he ruminated lovingly. "Oil and grease."

They went out. Cheque or no cheque, there would not have been further hint of estrangement from Wilfred. The bitter jealous enmity between love and friendship—bitter because between the temporary victor and the rival that can wait and win—had seldom been so casually disarmed.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN he got home late that afternoon Alec found his Aunt Cathy hovering about the hall, with nervous importance.

"Oh, Alec. I've been waiting. Your father—he wished me to speak—he wishes us to have a talk together." She was deprecating and excited.

"When did he get back?" Alec was eager for that information.

"Oh, a long time ago—a long time."

"When, exactly?"

"I couldn't quite say, Alec." She became secretive at once, indulging herself with sensational fantastic conjectures about the motive of the boy's question.

"Oh, surely you must know."

"No, I really can't remember." She pushed out her lower lip. No doubt Sidney and the boys were keeping something from her.

"Before lunch?"

"I think he was late. I don't know." The wish for intrigue urged her: it seemed mysteriously important not to enlighten her nephew.

"But you must know whether he was late or not." They walked up the stairs.

"I really will not be bullied, Alec, I—"

"Was he at lunch at all?"

"Of course he ate his lunch."

Alec gave up. They entered the little room that Aunt Cathy called her "boudoir," where she had to have so much of her own company, which she hated.

"Well, what is it?"

"I have to take the place of a mother to you *now*." She sat very erect, reproving his lounging attitude. "You are making your father very unhappy."

"'Unhappy'? *Him*?"

"We must all try to be especially considerate of him now. I'm sure your own niceness of feeling will tell you that."

"All I want is for him to leave me alone!"

"He is very much pained and hurt by your disobedience." Mrs. Mowry was making an effort to remember all she had prepared to say, and to say it in the right order. "Especially at such a time as this. Now I'm sure, Alec dear, it's only because you've been thoughtless and unrestrained. You won't do it again, will you?"

"Do what?"

"You know." Her delicacies obstructed her. The boy's question seemed unfeeling gross. "It wouldn't be nice for us to—to go into any detail, you know it wouldn't. It would be—coarse."

"Oh, all right." He got up.

"Alec! Won't you promise me?"

"How can I, if you won't say?" He turned and examined a framed photograph that stood on her writing-desk.

"I mean not to—not to run wild. If you'd just be quiet—and think. These bad girls—"

"'Bad girls'!" He flashed angrily.

"The Clark girl—"

"Oh, Frippie! Don't worry about *her*. Who is this photo? I've never seen it before."

"Oh." Mrs. Mowry dropped her eyes. "I didn't mean you to—I've had it put away for a long while. And you know, it's not only the Clark girl."

"Well." Alec blushed. Gillian's light quick figure, all her tingling mobilities, were instantly on him. "I don't care—"

"You can't wonder at our anxiety, Alec. To have made a deliberate assignation!—Of course no one would mind your meeting nice girls, in a nice way."

"Did my father say that she wasn't—wasn't 'nice'?"

"And then you know—that dreadful man—that wicked man who has done us all such terrible harm and wrong—"

"Did he say anything?"

"It was because of her that that man came down here to begin with! And every one knows—"

"What did Father say about her?"

"I don't at all like to talk about such things—"

"Why shouldn't you tell me what he said?"

"It shows that there was something quite *wrong*, you must see. . . . And you're much too young to think seriously of—of anything like this, in any case."

Alec looked at her in amazement. "Seriously"! What a word! But of course she couldn't possibly know how he— "I want to know what my father said," he insisted,

"Of course he was very much distressed. If you'd been older, and had met her at people's houses, if you'd had some sort of an understanding, even—but it seems you'd only seen her once before! No one could possibly think it right. And just after you had met that—that 'Frippie.' Yes, your father knows of that. And when we remember the—the very queer opinions, *and* friends, that Miss Collett is known to have, we can't help being all the more distressed and uneasy. In a way it makes it all really worse, her being a—" She could not bring herself to say "lady." "Her being socially—well, not of the class of the girl Clark."

"I should think she wasn't!" His aunt's words and phrases began to ruffle Alec with their ineptness. His father "distressed"—Gillian "not of the class" of Frippie.

"You will end this—this foolishness, Alec, will you not? You know you are very dear to us—" This last expression seemed to her to confirm, fully, the whole demeanour of her present talk; Mrs. Mowry felt herself in full achievement of her new prominence in the household.

"But, Aunt Cathy, you don't in the least, you can't—" "Foolishness"! There she was again. "I say, who's that a photo of? It's a jolly pretty girl."

Aunt Cathy's tightened mouth pulled jerkily down: she stammered, her face twitched, then there came a sob, loud and ungainly in its forcing out from suppression. Alec stood, terribly confused and helpless.

He could not look at her, he was too much disturbed to be puzzled by the effect of his simple observation. This sudden indecent intrusion of reality upon pretence was too much for him.

"It was of—of me," at length she told him.

"You! Oh, I say—I'm awfully sorry—" He sat down, still looking away.

"Yes." She dried her eyes. "It was taken just before I was married—to give to him." She wanted to intimate to Alec that her emotion came from the memory of her husband's untimely death, not from the thoughts of her own lost fruitless youth and prettiness. The truth was that the photograph had been taken when she was a year or so widowed, for the man to whom she was then engaged. "I'm sure it was all for the best," she added.

"What was?" Alec half looked up, catching sight of his aunt's neck, struck by its emphasis of her age.

"Oh, everything. I *could* have married again, you know, Alec." She flushed a little, with pride: even the worst bitterness of her unconfessed regrets had always been touched with pride and a certain excitement.

"Yes, I remember. Why didn't you?"

"It wouldn't have been right. Faithfulness is a great thing, Alec, even after death. If you have once truly loved, you never can— It wouldn't have been nice." This was her expression of the idealizations that had supported her for a quarter of a century.

Alec looked at her. She seemed quite different.

Her eyes were bright, her mouth was loosened. "Of course—" He hesitated, thinking of "true love" and Gillian. If he were to lose Gillian, he would never marry any one else, of course not. But that wasn't the same. That photograph—Aunt Cathy— . . .

"Queen Victoria . . . what a wonderful example *she* gavel!" Alec stared, being of a generation to which Queen Victoria was nothing. "Your father was quite right—quite."

"Father! What had he to do with it?"

"Why—" Malice and revenge, from under deep cover, prompted her. "Why, he made me see—how very undesirable—"

"He stopped your marrying again when you wanted to!"

"Oh, not 'stopped.' He made me see. Of course he did right."

"Good Lord!" Alec passionately resolved that he would never let his father make *him* see anything. "Why, he married twice himself!"

"Ah, and see what's come of it!"

"He didn't really— It wasn't fair! It was just like him!"

"Oh, you mustn't say that. We mustn't—" She could not help being consciously gratified.

"And you'd only been married for two or three weeks—"

"But it *was* marriage, Alec."

Her outward intention was to stress the enduring sanctity of a marriage that might be only of an hour: inwardly she fostered her pride in not being an old

maid. This pride was constant. If any one called her "Miss" she never forgave him.

They sat silent. Alec, out of his new emotions of that morning, felt sorry for her. He felt indignant and helpless. He thought of Mervyn, in association. He reproached himself with lack of sympathy for Mervyn and Dolly. He had been just as unsympathetic there as Wilfred Vail had been for him. After all, what did he know about Dolly? Mervyn— Here, too, his father stood, baulking and evil, a thing to harm them all, spoil every one's life, bite it up, if he could. It was what he had done, and he'd go on. His guilt gathered weight. Alec's anger against his father rose again, with the same cold force.

"You will see things in the right light, Alec, won't you? You will be true to your conscience?"

"I'll—oh, I don't know what I'll do!" He got up. "Is Mervyn in?"

"But, Alec—"

"I want to see him. I must go, really."

"And you won't promise—?"

He left, closing the door gently. "Conscience." The word rang memories of childhood. It had always suggested some offensive insect—"still" and "small." "I should have thought your conscience would have told you."—Mervyn didn't seem to be in the house.—Alec, opening the side-door, heard him in the region of the stables:

"She's a la-ady,
She has a daughter
Whom I adore—"

The young man broke off, and started humming the tune, wandering away with his back to the approaching Alec.

"I say, Mervyn—"

"Hulloa, what are you up to? You're a nice kid. I say, you have been going it."

"Have you spoken to the guv'nor yet about—you know—about you and—?"

"Oh, I spoke all right. So did he."

"What did he say?"

"Wanted to know if we'd *both* gone nutty. Said he was beginning to think he was in charge of a lunatic asylum."

"What did you—?"

"Oh, he was hopeless. I saw that at once. It's your fault, too, why the devil did you want to go and get clobbered? I didn't know he'd clobbered you, or of course I wouldn't have—but it wouldn't have been any good, anyhow. I knew that, really." He sat down on a bench in a corner of the stable.

"Well, but can't you—? Good Lord, it's—"

"Oh, don't get so damned excited. What can I do? He went on six to the dozen. 'Won't hear of it'—'My old friend, Dr. Resine.' Said I'd be tearin' the last shreds of the family honour. Started talkin' about Dolly, too, but I shut him up there."

"But he can't stop you. Why didn't you say you'd made up your mind?"

"Oh, confound you, don't *you* begin now. How the deuce can I marry Dolly on twopence-halfpenny a year? I had to agree not to go back to Oxford, that's

all I got out of it. Lord, he said he'd stop that cheque; he would have, too."

"Let him. Look here, I've got some money." Alec felt powerful, with that cheque of Wilfred's in his pocket. "I'll share it with you. Let's both go up to London and be free of him for good. We could get some kind of work—"

"How much have you got?" Mervyn asked sceptically.

"Twenty pounds."

"What the hell's the good of twenty pounds?"

"Well. He didn't stop that hundred, did he? You could get it through at once."

"Who gave you twenty pounds?"

"Vail did. Lent it. I'm going to London, you come too, and—"

"Oh, but you see, I agreed—"

"What, you don't mean to say you agreed to marry Nita!"

"Oh, damn it all, don't cross-examine me like a blasted lawyer. I didn't exactly." Mervyn began humming again.

"I don't see why, if you really care about Dolly—"

"What are you after, anyhow? Another elopement? Gad, that *would* be too damn funny!"

"Oh, of course, if you want to laugh—"

"Why shouldn't I? It's no go, that's what it is, you might as well laugh. He's got me, he knows that. I don't care, I shall manage to see something of Dolly all right, you bet your life. 'Mrs. Dra-ake,' " he half sang, " 'She's a la-ady, She has a daughter, Whom I

adore.' Fancy your bein' struck on that Collett gal," he added indifferently.

Alec looked at his brother with a new sharpening of perception. He realized how little dominance of will or spirit there was in him now. Yet he hadn't always been like that. When the war was on, and before he had got into it, he was different. Had his spirit been used too hard, used up, which was the same, in result, as being broken? Alec, without phrasing his thoughts, had glimpse of the possibility of disintegration of will and spirit by violence, by excess of effort terrifically sustained in the midst of all that unnatural choking abundance of death and torture; he understood, though vaguely, the isolation of himself and all those who, like himself, had been born too late for that call on spirit and will. . . . Mervyn went on with his humming and half-singing. Alec knew what he would say, if he pressed him further. "What's the use?" "Anything for a quiet life." The boy hardened under his brother's acquiescence. He knew now that he'd have to do everything by himself, everything important.

"Do you know what the guv'nor said?" Mervyn remarked suddenly. "He said it didn't really matter much who you married, not after the first year. That if you were anything of a man, you'd make her the right wife for you by then, whatever she was to start with. Queer idea, what? I suppose there may be something in it."

"Oh, *he's* never been in love, how could he be?"

"Well, I suppose he meant that after the first year *that* would be all done with—I wonder?"

"It wouldn't! If you're really in love it lasts for ever, I know it does!"

"Yes, it does feel that way. Don't see how you know, though, kid like you. Must be time for supper. That's the gov'nor nosin' about by the shrubbery. Let's clear out. Damn funny how one gets to hate the sight of one's gov'nor, isn't it? Come along."

"I want to talk to him."

"Christ, I don't!" Mervyn sheered off.

Alec, walking to the shrubbery, felt convincingly that he had given his father his chance, and that his father had deliberately rejected it. He did not see that, with Mr. Glaive, there could never have been any real question of a "chance," any question of conscious rejection or acceptance—at this set time of his life, least of all. The boy, as he approached, played unwitting comedy in his irresistible sense of being a judge who had passed sentence.

"Well?" Mr. Glaive screwed up his eyes at him. He thought his demeanour astonishingly insolent.

"I want to go to London this week."

"Oh, indeed."

"Yes. I'm going to London."

"I do not allow you to go."

"All right, then."

"Do you mean you defy me? I shall not give you one penny—not a farthing. I've had enough of this." The man's colour drained slowly out.

"You're not the only person I can get money from."

"Oh, I see! I might have expected that. Williams and his gang, they're bent on dishonouring my name to the utmost! They're using you against me, and you can lend yourself to it!"

"Williams—?"

"That woman is a—a *friend*, let us say, of his, don't you know that?"

"I don't care if she is!" Alec missed the implication.

"If you go, you won't come back."

"Oh! D'you think I want to?"

"You admit she gave you money?"

"I shan't tell you."

"It is outrageous. I will not have it. You're under age. I—I shall appeal to Mr. Collett. Of course I know perfectly well why you want to go to London. Didn't your aunt tell you that it was entirely on that woman's account that Williams first—"

"What did you say to—to her?"

"It ought to be enough for you, the knowledge of that association. That should settle the matter absolutely. If you had any sort of regard for me, any sense of the family reputation, any moral sense—"

"What did you say to her?"

"How dare you take such a tone, sir?"

Mr. Glaive looked sharply at his son's vivid stiffened face. He turned away. His anger and vanity and jealousy began to give ground before the approach of a new attacking force: he laboured un-

easily in the thought of the new humiliation that such a breach with Alec would bring on him. The connection with Miriam—a connection terribly, indecently close—disgrace upon disgrace. And here was Alec, silent, obstinate. They would finance him, no doubt . . . anything to feed their malice . . . against him . . . how grossly wicked!

"You are your own enemy." The father changed his tone, which became grave and reasoned, and controlled. "I should not be fair to you, I should be neglecting my responsibility, if I did not point that out. I do not speak of your duty to me. That, I know, you do not regard, not at this moment. Later, you will. No Glaive could ever—you will be sorry that you—" His voice broke artfully.

"You haven't told me what she said to you."

"It is a question of your duty to yourself, it's a question of your *career*." He intensified the word piously. "Is this a good beginning, Alec—I put it to you merely on the grounds of common sense—is it beginning well to make a break with your home, to defy your father, your father who has supported and helped and counselled and—" his voice dropped, "loved you all these long years?" Carried high on the flow of his idea of himself, he spoke with perfect sincerity.

"Did you try to persuade her?"

"I should never act in any way but for your interest. I never have, as you well know." Glaive began again to twitch with jealousy of his son and the girl whom he had driven into Malstowe that morn-

ing. The absence of his wife had begun to harass him. Alec *must* not go to London. "As to my conversation with Miss Collett—" Glaive resolved to be tactful: he would even, in a dignified way, be propitiatory. "As to that—"

"Well?"

"There is nothing to tell you." He paused, with the boy's steady demanding eyes upon him. What audacity! When he had made him! His *son*! Thank God that Mervyn— Recalling his triumph over Mervyn, "You don't imagine," he went on with a familiar swing of sarcasm that reassured him at once, "you don't imagine, do you, that when a woman of her age makes an assignation with a schoolboy the first time she sees him—well, there wouldn't be much she could say to his father, would there?"

"You mean that you didn't talk about me at all?"

"She was clever enough, experienced enough, not to, and I think I know when to speak and when not to speak.—Now, Alec." He remembered his tact. "We've all been under a dreadful strain. Action and reaction. I quite allow for that. I understand, only too well, the terrible influence of example. One evil act. The loosening of one bond in a family may threaten the loosening of all. We have to stand together. As you know, it's not only you I've had to deal with. This trouble with Mervyn and some shady little milliner's apprentice, coming on the very heels of—"

"Look out!"

"You are not yourself, Alec. I can't regard either

of you as responsible. But at least Mervyn came to me, he made a clean breast of it, and he ended by seeing things in the right light."

"He didn't! Why did you stop Aunt Cathy marrying again?"

"What do you mean?" Mr. Glaive's eye shot angrily. "She told you that?"

"I know you did."

"Then disabuse yourself of so—so preposterous a notion. Your aunt has always been a perfectly free agent." He determined, viciously, to speak to Catherine. She must have said something. "*My advice* was given for the best—in a matter of which you can know nothing. A matter which it would be most unbecoming in me to discuss with you or with any one."

Glaive jerked his head impatiently, and started walking back to the house. Alec walked with him, silent, unbelieving. His thoughts of his father's selfish cruelties, as he saw them, lacked light of older knowledge. He could not realize that Glaive, like your Oriental potentates, found it necessary for his convenience and comfort to have eunuchs about him: the boy could not be expected to appreciate the morality of this predilection which placed his father in such essential support of a society whose rules decree the unsexing of a certain chance few. Nor could Mr. Glaive be expected to explain the matter to him.

So they walked on without speaking. Mr. Glaive's thoughts turned almost at once from his immaterial sister. The prospect of letting Alec go to Gillian

Collett in London was tormentingly bitter: and why should he, why should he? Who wouldn't be on his side there—a *father*—? But he had to face the fact that if there were a clear break, that would be worse, every one would see it, all eyes would be freshly on him, he knew how. Alec must not go, flouting him: a double calamity, hitting both his jealousy and his self-esteem. He must use all his skill to prevent his son seeing that he was prepared to give way. Surely Alec wouldn't really go so far. . . . If only that unprincipled impudent clever wench hadn't given him money! How could he take it? No pride. . . . And what obstinacy, what cursed obstinacy! That he should be at the mercy of this young mule! Catherine must have been to blame, somehow: if she had had anything to do with it, if she had got herself mixed up in her silly way, he'd pretty soon—Glaive's mind struck out in febrile search for something to help him—some implement. He felt gravely wronged by a system that gave nothing to his need. There should have been something, it reflected on the general morality that there was not. His sense was that at that moment he ought to have been able to call down a thunderbolt from heaven.

"You have your work to do for Oxford," he announced with a forced mildness. "This week you were to start coaching with Mr. Braithwaite. You have to pass Smalls, haven't you?"

"'Smalls'?" Alec half-grunted, half-laughed. The emergences of resemblance between his father and Aunt Cathy were comic. Alec felt, tickling down his back, the ineptitude of this anticlimax.

CHAPTER XX

DEATH, with its familiar intervention at an awkward haphazard, its familiar accidental wantonness, chose this time. It came up to Alec out of nothing, and addressed itself to him forthwith as an incomparable fact.

The boy, who could no more take that fact than he could have taken the values of Æschylus or Michael Angelo, almost at once ran off from it, with queer brain-buzzings, with specked quiverings of the vistas of his feelings. The tragedy's visible first effect was to make him pull his valise from under the bed and pack it, with a dispatch that was orderly and directed; indeed, of a meticulous direction unusual to him. He folded each necktie. His mind was traversed by memories of his old nurse, memories of a Malstowe boy with whom he used to go out rat-catching when he was about twelve, schoolday memories, obscene jokes, snatches of poetry. . . . "Down the all-golden waterways, Its feet flew after yesterday's. . . ." "Its feet"? "His feet"? Which was it? "Fear no more the heat o' th' sun, Nor the furious winter's rages. . . ." His nurse used to say it wasn't the wearing the neckties that wore them out, it was the tying them. "That girl's gone and put three blankets on my bed in the middle of the summer, why, I shouldn't need more at Christmas!" Alec reflected

on the certainty of his never forgetting those observations so long as he lived. What was the reason for his remembering them so faithfully, so accurately, with the intonation of each word? There was nothing round them, nothing else that he could remember. . . . An accident—chance—no reason, no meaning. That last day at school, the farewell Chapel Service: "Those returning, those returning, Make more faithful than before." Hudson major, with his great ugly face, singing lustily. "Faithful"! Aunt Cathy believed in being faithful, that was why. . . .

But he would not think of Aunt Cathy, nor of Mervyn, nor of his father, nor of— He tried hard to think of Gillian, he couldn't see her, everybody else was more real, that wasn't right, why should they be? Suppose it had been Gillian who had died? A person dying seemed to make everything so awfully unsafe, somehow. He must, must, must go at once. All the more. This determination, sprung from his passion, and already rivalling its dominance, now, under the shock of death, almost replaced it. His recklessness was intensified. Tonight he'd be in London. . . . He went on packing, less carefully, impatiently: he knocked some things on to the floor, he hurried over to the washstand to get his tooth-powder. Dr. Resine must have been in a hurry the evening before. Dr. Resine thought such a lot of himself, he— Alec burst out laughing. The old doctor, with his fat paunch stuck out, he must have been strutting round all over the place, fussing and fuming and keeping up his dignity. And all the while

the guv'nor, in the diningroom, talking, talking, talking rot. . . . Alec sat on the bed, laughing violently. What made it so specially funny was his father not knowing about Dr. Resine, and Dr. Resine not knowing about his father; the comic separateness of the two men and of their actions.

What had happened was that on the yesterday evening Mr. Sidney Starr Glaive, well launched at last on his postponed discourse, doing his best with it, had rejected the interruption of a request from his old friend and near neighbour, the doctor. When there came a tap at the door, he was in the dramatic midst of his exposure of moral issues, both in their larger significances that trailed heavenwards, and in their dispensed application to the recent domestic event: he was engaged, skill at full stride, in putting this domestic event in its final place for himself and his family, and as God saw it. The tap enraged him.

He had darted to the door and flung it open.

"You knew you were none of you to come, on any pretext!"

"Yes, sir, very sorry, sir, but it's Dr. Resine's chauffeur, and he say as how the car hev broke down, and he've a case he fare to hev to goo to at once and please might he borrow—?"

"Tell the man he's to wait a few minutes." Mr. Glaive slammed the door.

This annoyance hurt the rest of his harangue, and prolonged it. Those right words that he had had so well in hand for implication of reproof to Alec and Mervyn went awry: he had to go back to them and

pull them straight. But his delayed peroration made amends: "Our union as a family is now, I am convinced, more real than ever it was. We see now that there could have been no real union before this thing happened. Our very foundations were being secretly sapped: the fount of our being was all the while defiled by the poison of a living lie. Those fair well-springs of our life—they had become 'A cistern, for foul toads to knot and gender in.' It is better that we should know, as we know now. The blow has struck hard, but in the very force of its stroke it has welded us firmly. From now on we speak no more of it: we hold fast, and we hold together."

"Amen," whispered Mervyn, and Alec, under the reassertion of long association, had to strive against a giggle. Chairs scraped, and again there was a tap at the door.

"What do you want now?"

"Please, sir, Dr. Resine's chauffeur—"

"Oh, yes, yes. Can't the man wait a minute or two? I suppose I shall have to— Most inconvenient. It can't be an important patient, or they'd have sent Resine a car of their own. Mervyn, you come with me and see about this."

It was not till the next day, the Monday, that Alec learnt just how unimportant the patient had been. Dr. Resine had arrived "a minute or two" too late; Frippie Clark and her premature child were dead. She was not in her home, but with an aunt who lived somewhat further from Dr. Resine's house. Her father had so contrived it, out of a shame quick-

ened by his continual association at the time with his idol, Joe Matcham.

The young married woman, their former servant Elsie, who had been hanging about near the Glaives' on purpose, gave Alec this information. "Owd Jos Clark," she had said, "he's fair *stammed*,"—Suffolk for "bowled over." "What do you think of her now?" was what she looked, but Alec gave her no satisfaction, and she had to relapse compensatingly upon her natural rustic elation at a mortal catastrophe, and upon the prospect of sombre and startling gossip in detail about the affair with the Glaive servants. With Mr. Alec she had to leave out so much! But feminine delicacy would of course cease to be an obstacle in feminine company.

"He do take it rare hard, pore man. He say he won't be able to look Joe Matcham i' th' face no more!"

Alec, at that, had made a sound of contemptuous impatience like a suppressed sneeze. "Oh, well! I must— So long, Elsie!" He left her disappointed and surprised; she had had only a few scant minutes.

The boy had gone straight to his room. On the way his first thoughts were of his own guilt, not of his father's. "I never got her those grapes. I never met her that morning. She may have died because of that!" She must have worried about the grapes, he knew she must have. He'd begun it, and his father had finished—finished her off. He'd wanted to kill his father, now he had helped with his father in killing this girl. His father's talk . . . he had talked the

girl to death. Alec was not at all occupied by surprise either at Frippie's having a child or at his own so recent ignorance of that prospect. Such things happened to village girls who were not "careful"; they might, so he felt, happen at any time; it could never have occurred to him that he might be expected to know beforehand. It was not that he was more "innocent" than most boys of his age and class: it was simply that "having a child" was not a real concept to him.

Suddenly, while opening the door of his room, he thought of how he had kissed Frippie, only the other day. He was whelmed in uncomprehended horror, his thoughts stampeded from her: it was then that he took out his valise, with those buzzings and quiverings in his brain, while the memories so foreign to the dead girl came on him vivid in a rush, and held him safe.

Only once again before he left the house did he think of the death which had hastened his leaving. Fastening the straps of his valise, for a moment he questioned: "Ought I to go so soon?" but he did not stay to answer. He went quickly downstairs and put on his hat and coat. He was not either conscious enough or sentimental enough to think that "down the all-golden waterways" Death's feet had flown, or to entertain reflections on what might have been viewed as a step over the coffin of his first love to her successor. Yet she had been his first love, this ill-starred little village strumpet: if she had been merely light to him, his thoughts could have touched her

without that shrinking; he would not have had to go away at once.

He knocked at his father's Study door. "I'm going to London now," he said.

"Now?" Mr. Glaive was unprepared, baffled. Taken thus, he could not help looking as he felt, really frightened. "When? How do you think you are going?"

"I can walk to the village and get a trap to the Station."

"Oh, for heaven's sake don't do that! What will people think? Alec, I—" He confronted his son for an instant, time enough for him to realize the uselessness of any appeal. But, perhaps— "Will you not at least listen to Mr. Collett?"

"No, I don't want to see him, I couldn't see him—"

"He will be very much hurt if you don't. I wrote to him yesterday." Mr. Glaive looked at his watch. "I feel sure he'll be up soon, he would hardly come very much later than now."

"I can't see him. I didn't go to hear his sermon yesterday."

"I must say this is hardly the time to be frivolous. Your good taste, at least—"

"What did you write to him? When do you think he'll be here?" Alec looked apprehensively out of the window.

"I said nothing but that I was in trouble about you; that I wished very earnestly that he would see fit to use his influence. I asked him to come as soon as he could today."

"He wouldn't make any difference. I must go." Alec turned the door-handle.

"Well—one minute. I must, really, demand of you one minute. I may be doing wrong," he went on in an authoritative tone, "but I have now decided that the best way is to let you learn by experience. It is the only school. Any other father, of course— But I have never been the conventional father. My ideas do not run along the usual—er—grooves. Do you need money? I'll not refuse it you, you shall have it!" Mr. Glaive whipped out his purse. His eyes glistened, he was exhilarated. A gesture like that, at such a time, it was superb! What other father. . . ? Alec was surprised. Good. "Yes, I would give you money."

"Thanks, I have enough, though."

"As you will." Having made that large gesture, Glaive was content to be relieved of its material consequences. He was still regretting, at intervals, having given a whole hundred to Mervyn. "You know I have always— Well. Perhaps you would be good enough"—he spoke with a tinge of his suaver sarcasm—"to tell Marshall to get out the two-seater and drive you to the Station?"

"All right. If you'd rather." Alec was chafing, with continual glances out on to the drive.

"And one more thing. If I may suppose that you still have some fragment of natural consideration left for me? I don't want unnecessary talk. As a—h'm—as a matter of simple convenience, I shall say you are staying with a school-friend. To avoid misunder-

standing in the neighbourhood—particularly desirable at this time, you understand? I wish to have a gentleman's agreement with you."

"Oh, all right."

"Good-bye," said Mr. Glaive, with the right measure of coldness and restraint.

Alone, he suppressed the twinges of his jealous moral indignation, though they threatened a special acuteness because Gillian, deliberately committing and binding herself, had told him that she would not under any circumstances marry Alec. . . . The father reflected that his way of dealing with the affair was much the best and wisest. No talk now, no fuss. And Alec wouldn't stay long, surely he couldn't stay long. . . . By calling loudly to mind the pretence that Alec was to stay with a school-friend, Mr. Glaive began almost to believe it.

Meanwhile the boy, after giving Marshall his orders and having come back for the valise, caught sight of the figure of Father Collett, very black and large, approaching up the drive. He had forgotten him. He hesitated, then went out to meet him, with the valise in his hand.

"You're going away?" The priest looked grave, not surprised.

"Yes. I say, I wanted to tell you, I'm awfully sorry I didn't come yesterday—you know—to hear you—"

"Oh. Never mind."

"What—what happened?"

"Nothing happened, my dear boy."

"Nothing! But you were going to—"

"I did. All sermons are alike to them. I kept my promise, Alec." They turned back together down the drive.

"I wish I'd been there." The boy blushed.

"You are in love?"

Alec nodded.

"With Gillian, then?"

"Yes, I am."

"You're going away now to—to see her?"

"Yes."

"Well." A deep shadow of pain was on the priest's face. "It may be better. I think it is better. All this may mean—in the end. . . ." He broke off, wrought out of his words. "I mean that it shows the difference in you from others, and that gives me my hope." Alec moved nearer, he could hardly hear him. "You will be drawn, later, with the same force, to another end. You have not, now, that same hatred?"

"No. No, it's not the same."

"Ah! She took that away. It was she who did that."

"I hadn't thought, exactly. I suppose so."

"Well." Father Collett breathed hard. "All is by His will.—Alec, I am resigning the living."

"Father! Why? Please don't—"

"I can't stay. There is a death to my charge."

"A death?"

"I told you, last time, about that girl. If I had advised the marriage—"

"Oh, it was her, then; I didn't—"

"You know she is dead."

"Yes, but that— It was my fault, and his!"

"Your fault!"

"Because I didn't want her any more, because I didn't meet her, because I forgot her and made her unhappy."

"It was I who made her unhappy. God turns our wisdom into folly, and breaks us on it."

"It's brutal of him, then!"

"No. We are blind." They stopped, standing at the gate.

"Love is brutal, too!"

"Ah, yes, *ours*."

"It might have happened anyhow. It would have."

"No, no, she would not have suffered. It would all have been different."

Alec stood, wondering. That the three of them should have combined to kill her. . . . Who had taken and used them for this, and why? He could not blame his father now, not heavily.

"The life of the world is sad, and unbeautiful.— I have been thinking of resigning for some time, Alec: it was really only because of you that I stayed. Now, there is nothing else for me to do but to go. God has shown me: it was a sign, the girl's death. And the sermon. I speak here to deaf ears."

"Couldn't you stay, though, just a little longer?" Alec was seized with that same capricious teasing wish to turn the priest's will.

"No. I would not. I have already written to the bishop."

"Where will you go?"

"To Webley. I shall join the Order. It's not really such a sudden decision, Alec. For some while, as I said, I—" He was looking on the ground, and then suddenly raised bright eyes to the boy—eyes of a peculiar defenceless shining. "You will write to me? Very soon, I mean. I feel I must hear— I believe in you, Alec."

"Well, but— You can't be going at once."

"No. As soon as I can, though. I don't know. I hadn't thought of the time. How long will you be with—be away?"

"I don't know either." The two-seater car approached them.

"You will write, you will tell me everything?"

"Oh, yes," said Alec vaguely as he took the priest's hand.

Father Collett, looking after the receding car, felt that he could forgive, perhaps all too easily, Alec. He could not forgive Gillian, nor himself.

CHAPTER XXI

MR. CARLYON-WILLIAMS, that saviour of a crushed life, had left the object of his salvation in Torquay, and was himself now returned to London. He found it easier to think up to his ideals of the situation at a distance from it: besides, those last days in Torquay had begun to be a little trying. It was not so easy, he found, to sustain the right rôle with a constant audience of one, and Miriam sometimes had strange moods. His profound understanding of women, together with his sensitive reaction to the claims of his convenience, had prompted him to leave her for awhile. He had parted from her with the utmost tenderness, a tenderness adequately enough expressed to deserve incorporation in his next novel. She had been very silent, though—very: her response would not do for the novel at all.

One afternoon a week or so after Alec's departure for London, the distinguished author was sitting in a Club named by literary modesty "The Scribblers'," giving the final touch to one of his articles for *The Woman's Republic*. At intervals he would keep assembling his equipment for confirmation of himself in the rôle that he now was playing, with the assurance of a much more habitual practice, for an audience of many. He had passed through a great experience, a spiritual experience of fine flight through the arena of the higher moralities. His next novel

would be devoted to the exposition of that winged way. He might call it that—"The Winged Way"—only how could he indicate, on the cover, that "Winged" was to be given two syllables? "Wing'd Way" wouldn't do. . . . "The Release of—of"—ah, "*Sabrina*"—that was splendid, because *Sabrina* had been beneath the tides. "The Release of *Sabrina Wycherly*."—"Sabrina's Release."—Better. More distinctive. He took a bit of paper from his pocket and jotted the title down. "Winged way," too: he would bring that in.

Mr. Carlyon-Williams looked at his hands. They were delicate and white. He had just been washing them. Hands indicated so much: he had certainly improved the look of his by squeezing juice from a lemon upon them every night. Now he would be able to do that again. Since he had been with Miriam he had had to forego the lemon-juice. The odour of it was noticeable, besides he couldn't have risked her seeing. . . . A great experience. Washing his hands in the Club Lavatory, he had looked at himself earnestly in the glass. His good looks had not been affected at all; not unfavourably, that is. They seemed to have been heightened, rather, to something indefinably better and nobler. This was as it should be: for Mr. Carlyon-Williams's expressed philosophy largely lay in a steadfast belief in himself and every one else on his horizon being better and nobler than they really were. Every gesture of his, every tone of his voice, even the way he brushed his pleasantly curling hair, betokened this philosophy.

Miriam, though. . . . He could not make her fit, except by difficulties that were really awkward, into his scheme. Leaning back in his chair, with his manuscript on his knee, he frowned slightly, the gaze of his artificially fine eyes was clouded, his uncontrolled mouth, thin-lipp'd, with its look of emotional esurience, twitched a little. Not for the first time in his life was he ruffled and disconcerted by the fact that women, as soon as you got on really serious terms with them, never behaved as you had planned that they should, never said the things that you had, so to speak, written for them. Not even the women who had been his most whole-hearted disciples, the most ardent admirers of his work. His wife, for instance. *She* had disappointed him the most of all. If she had really been so enthusiastic over his novels, the least she could have done was to behave something like the people in them. Of course the great mistake there had been the child—the intrusion of the child. A mistake he would never repeat. It was true that the amours of his fiction characters were never rudely complicated by the coming of children, they were always mysteriously enriched. Still, the love of the artist himself should be sterile.

Mr. Carlyon-Williams's career as a husband had been cut short rather more than a year ago. Responsibility for the breach rested entirely with his wife's singular failure to realize the susceptibilities of his temperament. He had found it impossible to stay with her during her confinement: it was terrible to this expert in spiritual suffering to come within

the grosser ranges of physical pain. The man who had celebrated the sacred mysteries of motherhood in half-a-dozen novels was driven post-haste to the Riviera by the prospect of his wife's initiation: he could not but deprive himself of attendance upon all the poetical and holy circumstances that wait on the miracle of the birth of a child. When he had returned the house was closed. Mrs. Carlyon-Williams had gone to live with her mother; from that time on she had refused to see him.

Nearly half-past five. He must finish revising that article. She would soon be there for it. Now why exactly was Gillian coming, why did she want to, what did it mean? He had offered to send the article to her Office; he had had a certain delicacy about meeting her again so soon, he had even avoided this Club of which they both were members. But "Oh, I may as well come," she had said: "I rather want to see you." Mr. Williams, pondering, wished she had said that with a different intonation. The words, even over the telephone, might have been given some undercurrent, so many kinds of undercurrents. There might have been a hint of something, a nuance, something secret and subtle. *He* now, even in the few outwardly unimportant things he had said to her. . . . She had always been unfeminine, had Gillian: but even the most vauntedly unfeminine women were not unfeminine to him, if they were attractive; he saw to that. At least, there was the fact: she wanted to see him. And no doubt her tone was merely a blind, she had protected herself by it. Well, he would be

dignified and aloof, she had treated him very badly, and now his affair with Miriam had made her think better of it. Perhaps now. . . . Mr. Williams resolved to be on the look-out. And he would be careful to hold by his present advantage over her; she deserved that he should. . . . Oh, but she had been cold and heartless! Really, he should never have risked being involved with her, why had he? He meditated, then found the answer: of course she had wanted to pick his brains. So she had led him on, deceiving him through his love of beauty.

Ah, he was too easily exposed to beauty, that was it. Miriam . . . he must write to Miriam tonight. A pity that it was not so easy or so exciting to write to her now as it had been when he was only her half-acknowledged lover. But his last words to her had been that he would write every day. How unfortunate—again he was ruffled—that when he had promised this he had called her “Gillian.” The two names were in a way alike—not an unnatural slip: and somehow the parting and the promise to write had reminded him of Gillian. Heaven knew the two women were sufficiently unlike, though. . . . At least Miriam was womanly. It, was indeed, her unquestionable womanliness that had drawn him so profoundly: a reaction from Gillian’s abruptness, her challenging ways, her casualness, her half-mocking air of being on equal terms, her habit of taking everything for granted, as though there could be nothing between them that really mattered. Miriam was tender and serious, she had the true romantic depths, her appeal was in the

names of Protection and Pity. How healing she had been to him after Gillian's rebuffs! Gillian, who had so crudely tripped up his lovemaking by telling him that he "didn't amuse her, not in that way." Actually, when he had come down specially to Malstowe, for the week when she was to be there, she had said that. "Oh, Carl, you mustn't, I'm only *human!*" was what she should have said. As it was, of course everything was over—and almost immediately there had followed the revelation of Miriam Glaive. Miriam of course was very wonderful. . . . Confound that girl, she had put him out of gear, she had brought it all back, he didn't want to see her, his delicacy had prompted him rightly. Perhaps she had telephoned to him out of deliberate malice and mischief. Still, it might be that she . . . it might be. . . . He set himself to the article.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN, a few minutes later, he was conscious of Gillian, Mr. Carlyon-Williams continued his task without looking up. She was almost at his elbow before he raised his eyes. He gave a little start, he was mildly taken aback, then he rose, faintly smiling, as though she had brought him up to the surface of a deep dream.

"I hope I may say—'Well met'?"

"I don't know why you shouldn't. Have you done with this?"

She put out her hand for the manuscript. He watched her with gravity well poised, and was glad to see that she seemed a little nervous.

"There are still the last paragraphs. But I think they can stand." He bestowed the article upon her. "We might—perhaps—as you wished to see me." They moved to a more secluded corner. It was one of the less frequented upstairs rooms of the Club, and now, in August, practically deserted. Mr. Carlyon-Williams, prompted by his susceptibilities, remained standing. "You still have the hands of a Tanagra statuette,"—his voice was low—"a statuette of pale bronze."

"No new tricks since I last saw you?"

"'Tricks'!" He drew back, aggrieved. "It has not been a time for tricks—new or old."

"Oh, that's just what I should have thought it had been. New *and* old. You don't think I remember?"

"Ah, you were always determined to misunderstand!"

She had attacked him at once, she must be in love with him! Mr. Carlyon-Williams trusted in the literary rule of thumb that a woman never attacks a man unless she's either in love with him or so much piqued by him that it amounts to practically the same thing. "Don't you think I remember?" she had said: she had taken him back to that time of theirs. . . . Of course she was reacting from his capture of Miriam. He gave her one of his deep looks. Certainly she was on edge—not quite controlled. He could tell by her lips. Their disdainful flicker had both excited and affronted him: now he was affronted no longer.

"Since our last meeting—" He lowered his voice again, he meant to be a little cruel. "Since then, I have voyaged very far."

"Have you? Ah, you mean spiritually, of course. At least I haven't misunderstood you there—I couldn't." Her laugh discomposed him: it was not in the right tone.

"You belittle everything," he told her. "Is that the way to reach to whatever value and beauty Life holds? Always to dispraise, to make a mock—"

He went on, but her thoughts were with Alec's stepmother. All her interest in Carlyon-Williams was strained through Alec. She had come to see him under the pressure of her sense of the new startling relation sprung up between them from her love for

the boy whose father's wife he had taken: she had wanted to know if Williams had, after all, been capable of doing this serious thing seriously, of accepting seriously what had been done for him. She knew well enough why he had never been able to reach to herself: because he had never had the courage to give himself up, because he had always remembered that the right thing for him to do was to play the god before women, and that love was an occasion for beautiful sentiments. He had been afraid of that passionate clear forth-swept adoration by which Alec had won her—afraid of its strength, afraid of its marring of his rôle. Gillian did not then admit that Carlyon-Williams, if different in this, could have been loved by her; but the concealed contingency affected her, and had sharpened her curiosity about Williams's emotion for Mrs. Glaive. She had wanted, even jealously, a little, to find out if this adventure proved him capable of love; if he had given to Alec's step-mother what he had so utterly failed to offer to her. But, for Alec's sake, she hoped that he had; for Alec's sake she wanted him to treat Mrs. Glaive well, not simply to go on playing the god to her, for she couldn't live on that nor stay in it. The poor woman must have looked for romance, for some great emancipation through love, some deep equalizing of all Life's issues for her; and if she found that what she had got was something trifling and wordy, a thing of mock flights and mock subtleties and weak desire in mask— What would she do then? And how would Alec be implicated? "What *will* she do?" Gillian

now asked, for here was Hugh Carlyon-Williams talking on in quite the old style, not altered in the least, making great play, at that moment, with those pompous monsters, the "eternal verities." And he had begun a toying of sentiment with her at once.

Mr. Williams continued to expound the wonder and beauty and truth of his far voyage. "I can talk to *you*." He was sitting by her now, leaning close. "You are the only woman in the world with whom I could talk so about another woman and myself." ("But you've said absolutely nothing that I couldn't have guessed you would say," she thought.) "You and you alone can understand the—the inevitability of this thing. It was inevitable, as great artistic creations are. Yes, it had to be. A call that compelled: we 'could no other.' I can't tell you how glad I am that you came today, Gillian. You've brought me just the expression—the purge of my feeling—that I needed. And you've made me realize the beautiful separateness and rarity of that strange special relation we bear to one another. Nothing, of course, can ever affect that. It will always stand, untouched, unshaken, whatever happens. We poor frail accretions of humanity! How our poverty and frailness scatter from us at one single sweet breath of that sympathy we know! Yes, some things are eternally true."

He proceeded to caress their sympathies, while the girl kept wondering, more baffled than before, why he had run off with the stepmother. There couldn't have been force enough in himself for that. Of course

Gillian knew that it was out of pique at his failure with her that the man had begun to take his affair with Mrs. Glaive seriously; but neither pique nor his love of a theatrical *coup* projecting himself postured in the high-lights could account for the Carlyon-Williams that she knew having committed himself so far and so palpably—facing scandal that might hurt him, risking a divorce suit. There must have been some extraordinary determination, some intense driving force from the woman, driving with fury out of suppression. Or perhaps she had got him into a position from which he couldn't draw back without looking ridiculous. . . . Alec had never told her anything that made his stepmother in the least definite: she had asked him, she had found it odd that he had so little to say.

"What is she like?" Gillian interrupted suddenly.

"I can't see why you're not with her now."

"Oh, I return—I return very soon. It would hardly do for me to lose touch with—with—"

"With the literary life of the metropolis. Of course not. Besides, you had to see how people were taking it—to feel the public pulse. Naturally. But tell me something about her."

"Surely, Gillian, from what I've said you must have gathered—"

"I haven't gathered anything. You might have been talking of yourself and any woman in the world. I suppose you'd be bound to talk in exactly the same way, whoever the woman was."

"Egoism is hardly one of my failings." Mr. Wil-

liams secretly expanded under this fresh attack. He was sure she must care. "But to *describe* Miriam—"

"Yes, in detail, quite simply."

"Oh, my dear!" He was lightly reproachful. "How can I? I am too—too near to her, as it were, surely you can see—" It was clear to Mr. Williams's delicacy that his giving Gillian a detailed and simple description of Miriam would be unbecoming. His impressionist picture of vague emotional complexities had been another affair altogether. "No, don't ask me. Really, it would mean nothing."

"Well. Tell me,"—she breathed hard—"tell me about her family."

"Oh, the family!" Mr. Carlyon-Williams felt positively triumphant. Gillian's insistence—her evident agitation—it could only mean one thing. "I found her crushed and cramped by her family. Ah, my dear, what hideous sacrifices family life demands! She was in terrible spiritual suffering—terrible and constant. At once, I knew; and she knew my sympathy. Her husband—a vile little snob, nearly twice her age, a withered mean little soul, a vampire of egoism for her, sucking the blood of her every aspiration, her every— But you must have seen him and the others when you were—"

"Oh, hardly—in the most cursory sort of way. I—"

She bit her lip and paled, while Mr. Williams noted these fresh indications of his victory upon her. Of course it was all because of his having taken Miriam.

How strange women were, how erratic, how incalculable, how fascinating in their convolutions!

"I've never been in the house," she added rapidly.

"It is a *prison*," he declared. "Nothing can go free there, neither heart nor soul nor spirit. In that house—it is really terrible, Gillian—you have the sense of there not being room for anything noble or fine. And *she* was shut up there. I thank heaven that I could be the instrument of her release. The highest service that I have ever been allowed. . . . Why, her soul was gradually wasting away! Her heart was being drained dry!" Mr. Williams's words reassured him.

"How about the rest of the family?" Gillian felt uneasy and caught.

"Oh, there was a—a sort of an aunt. A most poisonous and malevolent old widow who combined with that weasel of a husband to make Miriam's life intolerable.—Why should we speak of such people? I can only feel grateful beyond measure that Miriam is at last clear of them all. Really it is marvellous that she hadn't been wrecked altogether—"

"Weren't there—I thought there were some boys."

"Oh, the stepson. A young fellow with a lackadaisically insulting manner. Blue eyes, pink cheeks, hair almost flaxen—you know—the complete Saxon type. They ought never to be allowed to grow up. 'Not Angles, but angels' is all very well when they're little boys. Later on, it's the most unsympathetic type I know. She had no comfort in him, I'm sure

of that. That kind of boy doesn't know what sympathy means—no Celtic feeling. I disliked him at once. Lackadaisical and slangy, no brains whatever. A mere surface. He was in the war, of course; much good it's done him!"

"He has a brother, hasn't he?"

"My dear girl,"—Williams was beginning to be bored—"really I take no particular note of school-boys. I always imagined that schools existed for the purpose of keeping them out of sight. The younger boy—I suppose he was inking his fingers in some classroom or other; anyhow, I hardly saw him."

"You did. You must have, I mean."

"Oh, yes. I dimly recall a gauche youth with long legs and reddish sort of hair. Very shy. He blushed and gulped.—I'm afraid I neglected any analysis of his personality."

Gillian turned her head and shielded her face, leaning on her elbow. She was scarlet. She was furious with Williams, he had ridiculed her. And Alec's hair was beautiful: any one would say so. She must hurt Carlyon-Williams somehow: not only his odiously tolerant ridicule, but his exaggeration of Alec's youth, enraged her; it turned all her doubts back on to her with sharpened and agonizing edge.

"And now—" Mr. Williams, his eyes resting on the girl's averted head—what delicious hair she had!—spoke with discreet tenderness. "Now tell me about yourself."

"Oh, come, that's good of you!" She looked up, and catching his expression, was seized, for all her

violence of trouble and suffering and rage, with a deliberate, a wicked desire to be provocative, to move his blood. "You really do want to know about me?"

"Of course." He leaned to her, responding to the mood that her look had given him—a response of readier *verve* because of her contrast with Miriam, who never could have looked like that, so enticingly young and flushed and tumbled. "You know that our shared hours are indestructible for me, whatever happens. Gillian—" Her drooped hand was vivid to his senses, and he only just saved himself from repeating his remark about the Tanagra statuette, in the agitation of the moment. Instead, he touched her hand, very lightly.

"Oh, *no!*"

She drew away sharply. She felt ashamed of herself, grossly disgusted by her instant success in turning him that way. "I'm a courtesan," she thought. "I must have the nature of a courtesan." And, looking at Carlyon-Williams with eyes clear of any sex-attraction for him, she was impressed by the absurdity of the spectacle presented by a desirous man: he seemed so intent, so hot, so babyishly grave, so fretted, but so comically holding himself together, even with a sort of spurious dignity—

"You mistake me, Gillian." Williams broke the pause, during which he had been thinking out the best line to take with her. "I wish I could tell you—a little—the thoughts I have of you. I am altogether loyal to Miriam, but your sphere and hers are far apart. There can be no conflict for me there.

You mean something to me that is far beyond any mere physical rapport. You—"

He broke off, halted by the fresh stir that the now receding flush of her clear cheeks made in him. Those lively fluctuations of light in her eyes disconcerted his eloquence, so did the little quick ripples that would keep going about her throat and breast.

"It's something that goes far past the common sex-excitement," he resumed, recovering himself. "Oh, altogether outsoaring *that!*" He trembled: he opened greedy arms to his exaltation that he really believed in as pure. "How often I have dreamed that we might—"

"I'm afraid you flatter us both too much. You—oh, well!" Gillian, for all her recognition of his humbug, for all her antagonism, could not help being gratified and pleased by the appeal, but she steadied herself by reflecting that it was one of the most telling that could be offered to a woman's sex-vanity.

"I really—" Williams, noting his effect, and thinking her rejoinder extremely promising, leaned to her. "This coarser and cruder sense-passion—in my truer moments I am filled with detestation of it! I know, and you know—how intrinsically stale and vulgar—"

"'Vulgar!'" The girl, remembering, turned from him, and her eyes shone. "Oh, you know nothing about it, then—nothing!"

"My boy!" she thought, and again, as for the first time in the Tower moat, she felt that tremor rise and break through her; but now she clutched at her sense

of it, in new knowledge, with a grinding tenacity to which she had since grown. Mr. Carlyon-Williams exulted. He could do anything with her now! The signs were unmistakeable. It was not the first time that fervent praise of chaste love had brought him a woman's surrender. Hot and heavy with thoughts of their next appointment, "Oh, my darling!" he whispered.

"Oh!" She sprang up, she shocked him by her look of genuine anger—a look that held its ground against his perplexed disappointment, while her mind framed: "How dare you?" "What do you think I am?"—all the conventionalities of indignant protest. "You don't know," she said instead, haltingly.

"What, Gillian, what?" He rose slowly.

"Oh, I belong to some one else, altogether!"

"What—?" He groped, he felt a fool. "What am I to understand by that?"

"Oh, you can understand all that there is to be understood."

"A lover—you mean—fully?"

"Fully; yes."

"Oh, Gillian! *You!*"

He sank heavily into the chair, and put his hand over his face. For all the theatricality of the gesture, he was hard hit. He had seemed so near: and even at the times when, before, he had given up hope of her, his consolation had been that she was invincibly cold. He had thus spared himself the sense of personal defeat, and he could endure the thought of her as unattainable by him if she were unattainable by any

one else. He could even make for himself something fine out of this, something worthy of inclusion in his biography as a rare spiritual relation, the relation he had been talking of, one shining especially for him, in unique pale lustre . . . the love of a moon-maiden, a matter for literary pride. He had convinced himself, in spite of every difficulty she had thrust against him, that he was and must always be the nearest to a lover that her nature could accept. In that conviction he had rested, content with the idea that he could always come back to her and touch her hand and find it virgin. He had wished to come back to her in this way, not now, of course, but after a decent interval. . . . So this was why she had "rather wanted to see" him. . . . Oh, the girl had no feeling, no sensitiveness of fibre . . . cruel. He had dreamed of her as always untouched, with himself in this distinguished close relation to her being so, himself understanding it all with such completeness. And now— Mr. Williams, like Mr. Glaive, sided vehemently with morality. He forgot all about the recent, the earthier emotions in which Gillian had moved him. He sat with bowed head, redeemed for the moment from his flimsiness, overcome by the blank finality of his loss. Alec had avenged his father.

When the smitten idealist looked up, Gillian was sitting opposite him reading his article.

"Of course it's nothing to you," he said, struggling against the peevish tone provoked by her heartless composure.

"My dear Carl!" She was light-hearted then be-

cause of her relief in having told him and punished him. And she couldn't pursue revenge with Carlyon-Williams: once having hit him, she had to treat it as a joke. "For a man who's been married and separated and then run off with somebody else's wife, I must say you're rather exacting."

"You invoke common standards?" Carlyon-Williams looked shocked. "You know how all that—" —he waved his past from him—"how it made its way on me."

Gillian knew how, more or less, but she was in no mood for the emotional elaborations that would follow any reminder. "Well," she said lightly, with a wilful flick of the whip, "haven't I been 'made way on' too?"

"Ah, but—but you—a *girl*."

"Miriam Glaive's sex is not in doubt, I suppose?"

"Oh, Gillian, I won't *argue* with you! We're beyond that, we're beyond words. I had dreamed that we might—but alas for dreams!—To think that you came to see me out of simple cruelty!"

"Oh, but I didn't—not in the least! It was because—well—" She was at a loss; nothing would have induced her to tell him that her lover was Alec Glaive. "Oh, I couldn't have imagined that you'd mind my being—being involved, when you're so very deep in yourself."

"Ah, well! I suppose that now we must always be far apart, calling to one another from distant peaks. I knew you had changed," he said sadly. "And you are sure you have really found—the great secret?"

"You can afford to patronize me, of course. When one has found it a dozen times or so—when the discovery is quite habitual—"

"Gillian, is this generous of you?" There she was again, as in the old days, tripping up his sentiments and emotions, tumbling them flat over on to their faces. "When you know what I must be feeling— But be sure," he went on weightily, "that if indeed you have—if you are—then there is no one more unfeignedly glad for you than I." He looked at her searchingly, with veiled calculation. Perhaps some wave of reaction against surrender and passion might bear her to him yet. "Surely you know that I can understand—"

"Oh, but you can't, you never could—I'm sure! That's what I always knew, that's why— You, with your ideas, your ideals, your continual deferring to them of everything you begin to feel, your continual forcing into them of every one and everything that comes to you! That unfortunate woman!"

"She does not consider herself so. She *was*."

"I dare say! That's the whole pity of it." Gillian, in sudden renewal of the agitation that her disclosure to Williams had quelled, felt her whole body strain and tingle. She cast about for an outlet. Williams hurried his defences against the polemic readiness of her mouth, against the lighted threat of her eyes that seemed to hold the start of the spring she was drawn together for. "Look at the kind of people who come here!" she burst out. "*Our* kind. What

do you think they can do for any society, for any individual?"

"My dear girl, you really cannot make me answerable—"

"I hate the sight of them. They injure me—they degrade me, can you understand? ever since—since he came. Can't you see that they've got all the hypocrisies and sentimentalisms of conventional people, they can't have their little 'immoralities' without pretence any more than a stockbroker can. I won't tell them anything!" she added fiercely. "I won't have them pretending about me, fingering us over!"

"There's a good deal in what you say." Carlyon-Williams was not ill pleased. His vanity was incompatible with a high opinion of his contemporaries. "I have certainly felt, myself—"

"Oh, *you!* What have you done but take advantage of it all? You make copy out of it! All this looseness of mind, this horrible mixture of sentimentality and slack sensualism that has to have its gilding. You feed on it all the time, you live on it! With your stories of these free, modern men and women, these pretty ones who 'out of the consciousness of their new age'—"

"You are most unjust." Williams flushed angrily. It did seem unpardonably unfair, this striking him in the face with a quotation from that article she had just been reading. "Because you have a lover, I don't see why you should turn on an old friend."

"I want to turn on everything!" Looking hard at the man, she longed to turn on him most of all, to assault his plumed personality, to lay violent hands on it. But the touch of that personality numbed her fingers, made them blunt and impotent, with the nor warm nor cold numbness of a limb that has "fallen asleep." "I can't take hold of you," she cried, "you're drugged!—What a mess we're all of us in!"

"My dear girl!" Mr. Carlyon-Williams, who had been standing very upright before Gillian since her offence of him, sat down again and drew his chair to her. "I—I think you want me to help you, to try to help you, don't you?" He indicated to her, delicately, a ministering hand. "You have been thrown, I can see, into a ferment—"

"Not your kind of ferment, though. I don't deal in your emotional specialities, as I've told you before. It's simply that I've never been so unbearably sickened by this perpetual fake that you and all the rest of them keep up, of doing everything from the highest motives! You yourself—I suppose you've been in love with a dozen women at least, but then of course you've had the highest ideals of all of them!—Whether it's taking some one else's wife or husband, or keeping a mistress or leaving one, there has to be this perpetual attempt at sublimation, and it rots you all!" She clenched her fist, and her voice rose so sharply that Williams gave a glance round the room. "*Anything* would be better. Why can't you any of you simply do what you want to do and keep quiet? But

it has to be in the name of some new revelation, some higher law! It's better to be afraid of scandal than to have to lean on that kind of humbug!"

"I don't understand you, Gillian. Sincerity is my whole aim—"

"We must have some tightening of the strings." She threw back her head, she looked on past Williams, seeming to leave him out of count, annoying him so much that he resolved not to listen to what she said. "We must get it somehow—or it'll mean that the huge effort of the war will simply have done for us altogether. We people— After all, what do we *do*, for all our talk? We've lost the courage even to be wicked. We creep into all our passions by the back doors, we've lost the power of defying or accepting, we're not safe without our texts on the wall to remind us and keep us in countenance."

"Good heavens! If you include me—as if I ever aimed at *safety*!" Mr. Williams felt it very necessary to impress himself at that moment. Again she provoked his senses, and now he knew it was no use being provoked. That intransigent look of hers had always whipped him amorously, and in her present vivid excitement of hostility she breathed herself too fully out for his peace of mind, she came too physically against him through the mobilities of her mouth, the shining and moistening of her eyes, all the pressures of her unruliness. His susceptibility to beauty sometimes made uncalled for demonstrations. "I defy and I accept with absolute freedom and courage."

"Ah, but you haven't the courage to stand on your own feelings and face them as yours. You never had, that was always the trouble. If only your idealisms hadn't sophisticated you in that way."

She stopped, struck by her having taken from the boy that direct strong passion which this man, with his thwarting mania for Platonic heights and ambiguous fine involutions had had to withhold from her; struck by the cruel irony of her not being able to keep the boy's gift, not being able to sustain in Alec all that she could so well have held fast by in an older lover. Alec soon would know the inequality that she knew now, the edges of that inequality would show—ah, they *were* showing!—with the lifting of the mists of his first fervours. Young love—she couldn't give him young love that he needed: she had hoodwinked him with a counterfeit, and he'd find her out. Gillian's state was indeed, as Williams had said, one of "ferment"; but all the suffering of the ferment came, not from her passion, but from her terrible and haunting insecurity. She had begun to feel appallingly caught. More and more cruelly she was rent by the conviction that real completion of love was impossible here, for all her surrender and his. Her experience, her brain, had spoiled her for taking immediate joy as itself, spoiled her for living in the simple beauty of the moment. She could wish, now, that this had never happened to them. She could even reproach Williams for not having been strong and clear enough to give her what might have saved her from this. She was in suffering of a stroke clear from Nature,

a stroke that could have fallen upon her in what condition soever of society or morals. This she knew, and knowing, she struck out in a harried abjuring of what was to her now the poor littleness of moral reform, moral revolution. She was constrained to an attack upon efforts the success or failure of which could mean nothing to her—nothing really deeply to any one, so her thoughts cried out.

Carlyon-Williams, meanwhile, had been protesting to inattentive ears his innocence of sophistication and his profound conviction of the value of true courage.

"All the same," she interrupted him, "there's no real courage left. It's the most ridiculous of all periods!"

"Oh, come!" Mr. Williams remembered his written word. "It's the greatest period of reconstruction ever seen—so much that's in formation, so much that's being tested. An age of new insight, new demands. And everywhere minorities are wrestling for the control of the future. You can't believe that we strive vainly, you used not to think so."

"Oh, I used to think that marriage reform and the motto of 'Every woman her own breadwinner' would save us all. But we *are* ridiculous. We just twitter, and play with our brains, we're as useless for ourselves as we are for what we call 'society.' We go perching on one and another of our little branches while the working-people and the clever politicians are fighting it out between them." It relieved her greatly, this forcing of herself from personal turmoil to general vistas. "And all the working-people

have got are the better wage and the higher standard of comfort ideals, all the politicians have got is adaptability and shrewdness and their drab doctrine of 'Keep as much of your skin as you can.' We want some aristocrats to save us, and there aren't any left. Can't people see that all the finer brain-stuff is going under, and that we shall soon get either a rule of lobby and money and journalists or a rule of proletarians turned middleclass!—And it's our own fault!"

"Well. In a sense. There is a danger of materialism. I've never denied that some of the signs of our times are disquieting. Indeed, I've pointed it out."

"Oh, so does every one!" She was suddenly on her feet. "It's late."

"Oh, hardly. Why should you?" He remembered the letter to Miriam that he would have to write when she had left. She had made that letter all the more difficult. He shrank from the violent readjustment that would be necessary. "Well—if you must—" Carlyon-Williams took her hand. She would come back to him; it was clear that she was not contented, she was restless, on edge, not happy. "I may at least wish you well!"

"Oh, yes!" She disappointed him, for she could not help laughing. His wishes seemed to touch her situation with such bizarre futility. "I'm sorry: but in a way, you see, you can't wish. You don't know. I'm in it—in it—that's all, and I don't want to give him wings or set him free or put a polish on his soul, I won't say I do, I couldn't be so impertinent, I

only want to—why should I tell you, though? I won't!"

She turned, trembling, she went quickly for vexed fear of his seeing that she was nearly hysterical. Carlyon-Williams stared after her, not quite sure whether she might not be in love with him, after all.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHY was it, Alec asked himself in much perplexity and some indignation, why was it that she had talked, that last time, about his leaving her? Why had she insisted, that day at Richmond, that he had not really burned his boats, when he knew he had? She was his: how could anything alter that? They could have been married by now; really and truly, they were married already. Then, why—? How could she want him to go, to go back to that house where everything would be as it was before, but blank and horrible as it never had been? If they were married, it would be a great thing done, a great confirmation. It would make everything safe; now they weren't safe. Gillian, during those last two days, had communicated her sense of insecurity to him, but, fearing, he tried to feel it as something entirely needless, something that marriage would instantly disperse. He saw marriage as a fine stroke, a grand gesture. Married, he could return home; married, he could do anything. Above all, he would be *sure*.

His was the ever-touching, the impossible and religious resolve to hold fast by what Nature, with her regardless material economy, thrusts from Man's grasp so soon. He moved in that blind drawing on to get the better of Nature by declaring a solemn

perpetuity of the most instable and fleeting, the most casual and undurable of all human relations. Bravely, viciously, pathetically, he would have forced Nature, that immemorial violator of love's faith; would have forced her to his strong will of the moment by a binding tremendous confession of it as a will for all his years, a will that had God for sponsor, God, Nature's Overruler. Held in the passionate impulse to cry "Deathless!" at the first sly stench of corruption, hoping thus to outdo death, he would win surer hope with witnesses, divine and mortal, to his cry.

They loved each other. Why, then! And at first she had not rejected the idea of their marriage, she had only put off. "Oh, don't let's spoil it by thinking about banns or Registrars!" . . . Incidents of their week's intimacy passed fluttering and lively before him. His first sight of her hair fallen to her waist—so fully a woman, that had made her, so fully his own. It had revealed her as woman in a way so utterly strange and wonderful; it had made her immemorial . . . her warmth that hastened out to him . . . those silences along which they lay, far off, and together.

Why should there have been anything else to remember? Why had there been that bad day at Richmond, the Sunday? This was the day after he had first feared, and he had to keep on, with his inexperienced tenacity, arguing for marriage, pleading for it, insisting. He spoilt the occasion wholly. Gillian, with nerves sharply strung and fit for touches

of discord, could not cope with him; her normal self failed her. She was out of poise, and that startled and fretted him. She grew as insistent as he; they almost wrangled. She spoke against marriage, saying the kind of things she had thought of that day in the moat, and not said, every word seeming, to him, exasperatingly remote and irrelevant, and, to her, bookish. Her words angered her with herself, and out of that very vexation and annoyance, she, in like case with him, had to go on. She could not come too closely to their own matter, to touch what was the real argument, their separating years. She feared thus to bring the whole near weight of that cleaving stroke crashing upon them, and cutting her away. Meanwhile he strove, perplexed, not knowing that he was also striving with himself. Both of them were restless, anxious, fatigued. It was the ~~only~~ complete day that they had spent together. ~~On the week-~~ On the weekdays Gillian went to her Office as usual, ~~so Alec~~ never saw her before about five o'clock. . . . He wouldn't think of that day, it shouldn't count. His thoughts hastened back, intercepted on their way, baulked for awhile, by the consideration that she had told him to come to her later than usual that evening, and had not said why.

Now under the yoke, now under the spell of his reflections, Alec sat in the little bedroom of the shabby house in Shepherd's Bush where he had found lodging. It was not only a shabby house, it was an extremely shady one; as might have been guessed from the disarmingly respectable and discreet ap-

pearance, the suspiciously reassuring and benevolent demeanour of Mrs. Hannah Barnfield, its tenant. Practically her entire income was, in fact, derived from renting her rooms for purposes of assignation, at five shillings and sixpence a visit. These five and sixpences came in a continuous stream, both from regular and casual customers, and they enabled Mrs. Barnfield to indulge liberally in her passion for the collection of little figures and little animals, mainly of Oriental fabrication, in porcelain and ivory and silver. "So dainty," she said of them, and they were. Her fourteen-year-old son, Alfred, a sickly spectacled boy, helped in a bookseller's shop in the Charing Cross Road, and her daughter Betty, a year or so older than Alfred, in no way resembling him, danced at the Palace Theatre in Turnham Green. But neither of the children brought much of their small earnings to the house. Their mother was generous to them, well satisfied for them to pay for their own clothes and amusements, and for herself to provide their keep out of the wages of sin.

Alec knew very little of London. On his arrival at Liverpool Street he had taken the Tube Railway, invited by its Entrance which was near the platform at which his train drew up. He asked for a ticket to Notting Hill Gate—Gillian's address—but, in the train, he decided to go on past that station a little: the neighbourhood would be more or less suburban, and lodgings would therefore be cheaper. He was resolved to make Wilfred's twenty pounds last as long as possible: he thought he could make it last for five

or six weeks. The money had become very real to him after the Station-master at Malstowe had cashed the cheque. Arrived at Shepherd's Bush he remembered having heard of that locality as highly unfashionable. His father had once contemptuously pronounced its name. So he got off, and, carrying his valise, walked at haphazard. Mrs. Barnfield's house was the first one he saw with the placard "Furnished Rooms" in the window.

The purpose of this placard was to keep up appearances that were at variance with the reality of Mrs. Barnfield's accommodations: she had no intention of losing money by taking in respectable lodgers for a guinea or so a week. Seeing a youth alone, a youth with hand-luggage, which to her mind guaranteed the propriety of his requirements, she told him at once, from force of habit, that all her rooms were let. She had even begun to shut her door against the boy, when his look of intense and even suffering disappointment arrested her. To Alec this rebuff seemed to doom his whole enterprise to failure.

"Well," she said. "There's lots o' nice plices a little wye further up the street. Stryenger in London, ain't yer?"

"Oh, no, not really a stranger.—You've got 'Furnished Rooms' put up!"

"Lodgin's is very dear, young man, after the war." Mrs. Barnfield eyed him, and liked him.

"How much? What ought I to pay?"

"Well. 'Ow long'll you want to stye?"

"Oh, a few weeks, perhaps. I don't quite know."

Mrs. Barnfield tickled her chin, and blinked. She was taken by Alec's difference from the usual run of her customers. "If yer satisfied with a little room at the back—"

"Oh, yes, I don't mind at all."

"I might let yer 'ave it for a week. After which, I couldn't sye."

"Thank you very much."

He stepped eagerly forward. Mrs. Barnfield, fat, neatly dressed and demure, continued to examine him, and continued to find the examination satisfactory. She would give him the smallest room, with the smallest bed. After all, it was a slack time just then.

"And how much will it be?" asked Alec. The question of price loomed before him with remarkable importance.

"Oh, I won't be 'ard on yer. Don't you worry. You come with me, an' I'll show yer."

She led the way, very slowly, upstairs. Outside the door of the room, she told him to "jus' wyte 'arf a minute," and went in by herself, leaving him on the landing. When she came out she had in her hands a comb, a screwed-up bit of newspaper, a hair-net, a half-consumed cigarette, an empty medicine-bottle, five or six hairpins, and a piece of broken looking-glass. "'Bin tidyin' up for you," she said affably.

Alec walked into the room, not noticing anything about it except that it was very small, and smelt close. "All right," he said. "And how much do you want a week?"

"Five and sixpence," she replied, from force of habit.

"All right," he said again, in pleased surprise. Five and sixpence seemed so very little out of twenty pounds.

"Y'see—" Mrs. Barnfield hesitated. She had realized her slip at once, but now that he looked so pleased she hadn't the heart to correct it. "Well, I wouldn't do it for every one, but bein' as you're a gentleman an' it's a small room an' I'm sure you're nice an' quiet—" "Quietness," in Mrs. Barnfield's eyes, was the most commendable of human virtues.

"Oh, but of course I'd like to give you your regular price," said Alec reluctantly, little suspecting how "regular" the price was.

"Ho, no. I said five and six, and I keep to what I said. That's 'ow I am." She expanded with her generosity. "I'll interdooce yer to me son Alfred, 'case yer lonely, see what I mean? 'E's at the Pictures now, 'e goes most every evenin'. Me daughter, she's up at the Palace, she's in the Profession. Smart kids, they are, my Alfred, now, why 'e—" A ring at the front door interrupted her, much to the relief of Alec's growing impatience. "Well, I 'ope yez'll be comferble." Excusing herself with an air of marked dignity, even of hauteur, she left him.

Some five minutes later he had telephoned to Gillian.

The last frailty in passion is, for a woman, excusable in tolerant eyes by the oblivious sweep upon her

of an overwhelming impromptu of romantic love. Before that sudden onslaught her defences may drop and she come under pity for misfortune rather than censure for depravity; the charge being laid, with a sigh and a quotation from Thomas Hood or Robert Burns, to Nature's imperious urge, too strong for human weakness. That familiar extenuation cannot be fully pleaded for Gillian. She was, indeed, drawn with power to her young lover, and drawn far more romantically than sensually: her passion sent spreading circles far out from the fleshly desire which it compassed. The desire and its expression were incidents in the larger emotional outflow, incidents that played their due part, their inevitable part, in relation, for release and change; but, as things in themselves, they were reduced to an unimportance that can never be understood by sensualists or Puritans. Men and women of these two kindred classes heighten the import of mere sex-action because it is the only expression of passion that they can understand or admit. Indulgence and suppression, the one constant and indiscriminating as the other, involve the same curtailments, the same impoverishments of view. They involve the same obscene decencies and disgusts: Mr. Carlyon-Williams and Mr. McGill, the lay-reader, the "Purity Ghoul," knew these alike.

If Gillian had loved Alec more sensually, she would have drawn back: that lesser gain would not have been worth her surrender. Out of sensualism she will be condemned. If her nature had been more grossly amorous, and therein colder and narrower; if sex-

consciousness had played as much a part in her life as in the life of the average girl; even, it may be said, if she had not been, as she was, virgin—she would not have given so unreservedly, she would not have rejected the interval, the gradual approach.

But she knew what she was doing. Her brain held clear. She provoked the event, not he. To her deeper impulses there was added a fevered determination to snatch at the joy and delight that were there now for her as never, not even in blurred likeness, they had been; and as they never would be again, she was sure of that. She remembered how Carlyon-Williams had failed her; she saw herself in a destined succession of such failures, unshriven by the one full confession of herself offered by that hour. She knew, even from the beginning, how short that hour must be. If she refused it, the loss would stand firm, and all her theories, her professions of free faith, how bitterly they would mock her!—Now, when he had come to her—Alec—come driving his way, inevitably and at once, breaking down his father's will, finding money . . . He had come before she had said he might. She was touched and moved by that strongly: and while it might have delayed another woman, it hastened her.

Yet for all this she might not have so consciously formed her decision and struck so directly with it—so shamelessly soon, even by the standards of Mrs. Barnfield's amorists—had it not been for that intellectual sophistication which often does so much worse or so much better than blind feeling. She did,

at one determining moment, allow reason to challenge and to worst sex-instinct for the later as against the present time. Instinct was for hope of the impossible, for the trying of all ways to hold him for a longer hour: reason fronted the facts.

Alec had no sense of sin. His recent reaction against conventional moral values had little to do with this. He felt, very simply, that now he could look the whole world in the face, that the world must open its arms to him. He felt that he could never be ashamed of anything any more. This exultation held for five days: for five days he was as a god, knowing good and not evil. Then suddenly in one of their embraces, the thought came: It had never been quite the same as it was in the Tower moat. From then on, being no longer sure and satisfied, he talked of marriage, and their wills began to pull, straining. He was reaching, as best he could, for recapture of what she knew he could not have again, from her.

CHAPTER XXIV

AS Gillian went from Williams back to her flat a harsh intolerable hatred of herself drove over her, followed by a racking fear of what that self-hatred might do to Alec. It would turn him terribly against her, it must. . . . Her nerves wavered cruelly, they would break, she couldn't see him. She could not go to Alec from Carlyon-Williams. Some hotel, the nearest hotel. . . . If she could get a room, if she could be there alone, safe, in five minutes. . . .

As soon as she was in the cab, she was attacked by a bitter indignation against Williams. Why, when she didn't love that man, when she never had loved him, never could have loved him— Was that true, was that honestly true, that she never could have cared? Of course it was! Why, then, had this meeting with him now been so important? Why had he this power, to make it impossible for her to see Alec? He shouldn't have, she wouldn't allow it! She wouldn't run away, she wouldn't go to any hotel, it was ridiculous. She resolved to intercept her own flight at once, she told the driver to go to Notting Hill Gate Station. She was in panic as her sudden forced courage, her defiance of her instinct for safety, came up, battling against the leap of her apprehension. She wouldn't, at least, give any other order to the

driver, she couldn't have stood doing that. Why not tell Alec she was ill, when he came? She need only see him for a moment. She would do that: that wouldn't be running away, would it? She wouldn't let him see her strained face, he wouldn't know that she was harsh and nervous and frightened. It wouldn't be fair, seeing him, not when she was like this. She must walk quickly from the Station or he might be there first, waiting . . . walking up and down the street, as he had had to once before. He had no key, he hadn't asked; of course, he wouldn't have thought. He hadn't thought of anything like that, hadn't thought of passing as her brother . . . no intrigue. How untouched he was. . . .

She was breathless from her haste as she stooped to open the door: at once she went to her bedroom, to the mirror. "How dreadful I look! I look dreadful, he mustn't see me." Damp ends of hair clung to her cheeks and to her forehead, her face was pallid and moist, lines showed in it. How could she have failed so in control? It was shameful of her. She tugged at her hair, loosened it out through her fingers, let it fall, hid her face in it. She flung her hair back, drew it tightly back from ears and forehead, laid her face bare, scrutinized herself. . . . It was a direct stroke, a clear disclosure, that she needed with Alec. But she couldn't look like that. He might be there at once. She went to the bathroom, sponged her face in cold water, rubbed it with a rough towel. If she could somehow disguise herself! The bell rang. Her hair down . . . she would leave it, he

liked it. . . . She remembered what he had said that first day they met: "I shouldn't mind if it did come down." She went to the door, called his name, and he answered. "Wait a minute!" she said sharply. She went back to her bedroom, drew her hair tightly back from her ears and forehead, fastened it, fastened it close with hairpins, rolled it behind high on her neck, and so went out to meet him.

"Why did you make me come so late? Why, Gillian, Gillian dear, what's the matter?"

"Oh, I just came back. I've been—" She turned on the light.

"What's happened?"

"Look at me, you're not looking."

"Why have you—? What have you been doing to your hair? Do let me—"

"Don't touch it! I don't want you to touch it! Sit there, Alec."

"Something's happened, what is it? Do tell me—"

"You must go back, you must go home. I want you to."

"Oh, Gillian, again! You promised you wouldn't. You don't want me any more?"

"I *do*! I want you to go away before you've stopped wanting me."

"Do put your hair right, please do."

"No. I want you to see, I want you to know—"

"But I know I love you. Just because you put your hair like that, do you think that—? But you must change it, you must, and be like you were before."

"You don't know what I was before, you don't know what I am, Alec."

"Yes, I do, you're Gillian. I don't care about anything else."

"You do really. You must, even if you don't think so. Oh, I can't give you what you really want, what you ought to have!"

"But why—?" He sat looking at her face that was drawn and driven with its pain, exposed, solitary, braving him. He felt again that it had never been quite as it was in the Tower moat, refusing now, in sharpened loyalty, that feeling. "I couldn't want anything more!"

"I don't mean for now, I mean later. No, Alec, you must go. I want to make it easier for you, I've tried to. So long as you do mind going, a little, still. I'd like you to mind a little."

"I do, most awfully! Do change your hair back, do let me—just—"

"No, I can't. We must leave off, don't you see we must?"

"We can marry. Do let us marry. Let's make it certain. You know what I said before, I feel just the same."

"Ah, that's it!" She looked up. He was beautiful to her, his eagerness was very beautiful. She turned from him. "You're so awfully young!"

"You mean you're tired of me?"

"Oh!" She was seized terribly by a longing for him to come clinging to her, she was in misery and fear for her want of him. He mustn't know . . . but

why not, why shouldn't he? "If we keep on any longer," she said, "I shall have to marry you, I can't hold out, and that's why it must stop. Haven't I done everything? I've spoilt it for you already, I know I have, I couldn't help—" She still looked down, away from him. "Alec, I know that man very well, did they tell you? Carlyon-Williams."

"Oh, they said something about your being friends."

"I've seen him today, been with him. He used to be fond of me in a way, I ought to have told you."

"What, *that* chap!" Alec was shocked. "You don't mean to say— But you didn't like him, you couldn't have, did you?"

"Oh, I don't *know*!"

"But he didn't—he didn't ever kiss you?"

"Once he did. Oh, it may have been two or three times."

"They said you were friends. I didn't think—" Alec frowned. "But you didn't like him!"

"Alec. You'll find some girl who'll come to you utterly fresh—utterly *clear*—you deserve it. I've robbed her, I know I have, but I've left her a great deal. I won't leave any less." She wanted to add "I love you too much," but she was strong enough not to say that. "Oh, Alec, you don't know now, but it makes all the difference—*all* the difference. The kind of love I want for you is the only kind that any mother ever wants her boy to have, it's the love you've a right to, and I can't give it you. First love, young love. I know what it ought to be, because

I've been really young too. But I never found any one, not then. It was rather a pity, I suppose—"

"But you've found *me*." Alec tried to understand, he couldn't, his head was throbbing. "And I am your first, you told me I was." He thought of Williams.

"Oh, in that way, yes! But I've thought too much, I've known too much. It's *not* the same. You'd find out later on. Nothing is surer than that; if it weren't so sure, I'd stay with you, I'd risk a *chance*, of course I would! But you'd find out, and it would be terrible. I can feel it, and I can't face it. I'd no right to be your first!"

"What! You don't think it was *wicked*, you couldn't. . . ."

"If it had been only what people call wicked—only sensual— It's just because it was more, it's because it was too much and too little!"

"Gillian, *dear*. I don't. . . . Oh, do please put your hair down, don't—don't cheat me like that, be like you were, do!"

"I couldn't, not now. It would make it harder, saying good-bye."

"I won't say good-bye!" Alec got up and took her hands. "This isn't the last time," he cried in acute alarm, "it can't be!"

"It won't be any use, what use could it be after what I've said? You know now—"

"Oh, I don't care about what you said! I didn't even understand it."

"But you will. Alec, I'm horribly tired." She

put his hands from her. "You will go, won't you? You wouldn't stay if you knew, you couldn't—"

"But I can come again tomorrow!"

"No, no, don't, please don't. Not tomorrow or the next day, at least."

"The day after? But it's awfully long."

"I'll write, I'll tell you. I must be alone, I must think, I must get free."

"You could write and make it sooner." He leaned to kiss her; she put up her hand against him. "Gillian! You're tired of me, that's what it is, I knew it must be you didn't care any more, not so much—"

"Do *you*? Really, do you? Is it just the same for you? You know it isn't, Alec, not even after a week."

"You *shouldn't* say that!" he declared violently. "It is the same. Why do you talk like this, why do you keep on? We could have been so happy all this time! And now I'm not to see you for three days!" He spoke fretfully.

"Perhaps in three days. I'm not sure. I oughtn't to see you again, I don't know if I'll let myself be weak."

"Oh, Gillian, you must!"

"I won't say now. It's not fair. Don't say anything more, Alec, just go, I do beg you."

"All right, then."

He turned to go, in pique and disappointment and perplexity. His head ached: she had given him a

headache with the words that came from her aching heart. As he left her, he heard her sob, and he turned back for a moment. "But I *want* to marry you," he said, "I do want to, I want it so much!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE mornings and afternoons of that past week had exposed Alec to the friendliness of Mrs. Barnfield. Also to her curiosities, for she very soon began to wonder, agreeably, what he did with his evenings, for which he always declined her Alfred's invitations on the ground that he had to "see friends." Betty, the dancer, never got up till nearly noon. Two or three mornings after his arrival, she had run into him on the landing round a corner; she was in her dressing-gown. "Oh, Billie! and who'd have thought it was you!" She darted away, laughing, turning flying curls to him. Before that he had hardly noticed her. A few minutes later, going out, he heard Mrs. Barnfield reproving her daughter for being "free"—"runnin' round the 'ouse not properly dressed at this time of dye, I'm ashimed of yer!"

On his condemnation to the three days' absence from Gillian, Alec realized the need of defence against his landlady. She had opened the door for him, had commented on his being back so early, and held him with her talk till his head ached worse than ever. When he told her that his head ached and that he must go to bed, she made protracted suggestions of remedies. At last he escaped. He slept heavily and dreamlessly.

When he woke, it was late. His headache was gone. He dressed quickly, slipped out of the house, walked at a great pace to the little tea-shop where he had his breakfasts. Breakfasting was at any rate something to do, something to think of. What he would like would be to move about very rapidly. He wanted a fast motor, an open motor. Well, riding on the top of a motorbus, that would do. After breakfast he took the first 'bus that passed, a 'bus that went westward along streets and roads where traffic was light. Alec let himself swing in the mere motion, absorbed in the motion, thinking of nothing else. He went to the end of the journey, then he stayed on for the return.

When the 'bus had almost got back to Shepherd's Bush, it began to rain. The woman sitting next to Alec put up her umbrella. He noticed that she seemed conscious of protecting him with it. He didn't like that, it embarrassed him and made him nervous; he edged away. "You'll get wet, won't you?" she said.—"Oh, I get out here, I live here!"—He clambered down hastily and went to his tea-shop. It was time for lunch now. The time had gone, after all.

He ate lunch as slowly as he could. The rain went on. Perhaps he had better go back to the house for his coat. He might be able to avoid Mrs. Barnfield. He could say he was in a hurry.

But Mrs. Barnfield was not avoidable. She appeared at once, impressively solicitous about his being wet. Yesterday, she told him, he'd had a headache;

now, he'd have a cold. She'd make him some good strong tea, hot. He thanked her, he agreed: it would pass the time. "You ain't doin' anything partic'ler?" she queried curiously.—"Oh, not now. But I must go out soon again, you know."—He wouldn't for anything have admitted that those two evenings were empty.

When he had drunk his tea, Mrs. Barnfield invited Alec to view her collection of little figures—"my ornaments," she called them. She opened the glass front of the bookshelf in which they were locked. Alec examined and admired, Mrs. Barnfield lengthening the period of his admiration by informing him in careful detail about the places and the dates of her purchases. She fingered the tiny objects, one by one, her eyes glazed and excited. Transported by the delicacies of an ivory elephant, she once called Alec "dearie"—a term which, from her to him, struck the boy as unprecedentedly odd. Suddenly Betty appeared—an appearance flung at full pitch; completely caught by him for its unexpectedness, firmly held. He was startled by her noticeableness, he found he could not keep his eyes off her long black curls, those dead-black, so separate curls. The reflection that she was "an actress" gratified him: he had never seen an actress in private life before. "But then," he thought, "she's only a kid, she'd hardly count."

"Hello, Billie!" she said. "Having a squint round the Zoo?" She had none of her mother's Cockney accent; her pronunciation was sometimes too careful.

"'Billie'!" Mrs. Barnfield pouted. "The idea!"

"How should I know what his old name is?" The girl started whistling a tune, and went over to the window. "Raining," she observed, with complete indifference.

"Well, what of it?" The mother was watching Alec. "Just you tike a taxi up, dearie, I won't grudge the 'arf-a-crown. Penny wise an' poun' foolish never done no good, *I* say." She invited Alec's wandering attention to a porcelain alligator.

"Don't you go showing those books round, now!" Betty turned sharply. Alec had stopped thinking what time it was. He took in the unusualness of the colour of her cheeks and her wide mouth. He did not know that she used rouge: she used it skilfully, and might have deceived an observer more expert than he. "See?" she went on, as her mother did not answer. "Because I don't want."

Mrs. Barnfield gave her a look in which maternal suspicion and maternal understanding were blended. "That'll be all right," she said.

"Because they're mine. They're private. See?"

In a few minutes the three of them were looking through the books together. One contained photographs of Betty at various ages and in various costumes, the other was a scrap-book full of press-notices, provincial and suburban, of the various shows in which she had played. She had been on the stage since she was twelve.

"Oh!" she cried out. "You mustn't see that one. —Oh, it doesn't matter, I was only a kid then!"

"She always did have beautiful limbs, from a baby," Mrs. Barnfield observed with decorous satisfaction.

Alec bent his head over the photograph. It was of Betty at thirteen, plump and lithe, a too female Cupid. The boy's face was serious, he looked as though he were learning a lesson. "That's a silly one!" Betty gave him an inquisitive glance, and turned the pages.

There was coquetry in everything she did: in the way she turned those pages, the way she shook back those dead-black curls, the way she drummed on the table with her broad little fingers. In every possible way she threw out her propinquity as a challenge to the boy.

Mrs. Barnfield was talking feelingly of the temptations of a young girl in London. "Specially when she's in the Profession. They're something terrible, the men are. If you knew, just."

"Oh, shut it, Mother!"

"You may laugh, dearie, but once you give 'em 'arf a chanct or nod yer 'ead for 'arf a minute— It's watchful as a cat as does it."

Betty did not answer. She was looking at Alec, and looking at him freely, because his eyes remained fixed on the book of photographs. She liked him, because he had taken no notice of her at any time, because he had been so preoccupied. From the first she had suspected him of being "in love," and she knew, not consciously, that he was loved. Her unread conviction of this influenced her enormously, the conviction was as profound as it was remote. It was

the undeciphered signs in him of Gillian's love that drew this girl, and challenged her in her turn. Alec kept thinking that she was not so pretty as her photographs, and he wondered why the photographs would be dull if she were not there.

"My little girl will wait till the right one comes along, I know my Betty! One feller's enough for any girl, and one girl's enough for a feller." ("More than enough," Alec thought, in trouble.) "An' that's what I've always said! A nice girl knows a reel man, one what'll love an pertect her." Mrs. Barnfield brightened under the propriety of her sentiments. "Why are you so mum, Betts? It ain't like yer—" She wanted her child to show off.

"Oh, tired, that's it. Here, do you want to see this one? Don't go on looking at those stupid old photographs, I'm sick of them!" She pushed the book away, brushing his hand with her hair.

Alec glanced hurriedly up. "She is pretty," he thought, "at least she's—" He looked down, still grave.

Betty Barnfield did give a first impression of prettiness, but that came entirely from her eyes and hair and manner, her gaiety and youth. Certainly she had no beauty. Her nose was blunt, her large mouth lacked grace of curve, there was a certain shapelessness about the whole face. And even though she was so young, she had to take warning from her mother's figure and thought for her own. She was already anxiously afraid of growing up to be "one of those awful great big fat girls." But her child's slender-

ness was enticingly tempered, now, by the hints of her physical future, the beginnings that tinged her child's looks with sex. She violently attracted middle-aged men, for whom, unlike many girls of her age, she had a great distaste. She could afford to repulse them unequivocally, thanks to her mother's equivocal gains. Boys took little heed of her, and, absorbed in her profession, she had been much less occupied with amorous thoughts than are most well brought up young boarding-school girls, nourishing their curiosities and ignorances and dreams that spring in such sensuous plenty from the soil of their guardians' care. Lovemaking, to Betty, was a humorous matter, associated with the repartee of stage-comedians.

"Who wrote this?" Alec asked. "It's a sonnet, isn't it?"

"What's that mean?" The child leaned, and taking the book, sharing it with him, she stayed close. "Oh, good-night! The chap that wrote that was dotty!"

"I like it. I think it's very good."

"That pome what that Mr. Merridew wrote about you, dearie?"

"The first letters of the lines make my name, do you see?"

"You read 'em down. Clever, ain't it? 'E was an artist, so 'e said, useter sketch. Betty wouldn't take no notice of 'im, an' serve 'im right. 'E was'n' up to no good, a man don't go writin' pomes an' spendin' 'is money on bouquets an' big boxes of chocerlits fer nothin'. Says 'e met 'er by *chance*, we

know all about that! 'Ad 'is wicked old eye on 'er fer a week an' more!"

*By chance we met, a chance indeed
As kind and bright as hours of May,
Releasing song and holiday—*

Alec read. "Can I copy this?" he asked. "I'd like to."

"Can if you like. It won't hurt *me!*" Betty blushed, and her mother sat looking at them, absorbing the intimations of the boy's request and her "little girl's" mounting colour.

"A tall feller, 'e was, Mr. Merridew was, with lightish 'air an' wore it long—"

"Oh, he *was* soft!"

"O' course I know you never give 'im a moment's thought, 'course not." Mrs. Barnfield spoke with quaint dignity. She slowly rose. "I 'ave some dooties to attend to," she announced. "If you 'ave no objection to excusin' me?"

With fluttering heart she left them, every fibre of her sprouting thickly in the warmth of her romantic idea of the two of them there together, the "two young people." Mrs. Barnfield was indeed starving for erotic idealizations. If only she had known of the works of Mr. Carlyon-Williams, they would have gone far to satisfy her cravings. Her continual contact with the material final certainties of sex-desire, with the last demonstrations, all too practically arranged for, all too sordidly, and all too baldly linked with five and sixpences, had given her the sentimental

aspirations of a schoolgirl. Confronted perpetually by desire's later issue, in a presentment of unnatural severance, Mrs. Barnfield much required a relieving and adjusting complicity with first stirrings, shy beginnings, hopes just born and frail, longings frail and insecure, delicate delays and doubtful tremors, all the early apparatus of blossoming hearts. In these now she dwelt: match-making thoughts lay stilled under the generous flow of her romantic emotion.

"Where's that old pen and ink?" cried Betty.

"Oh, don't get it. Don't get up."

"Well, you wanted it, didn't you?"

Already, before he could struggle with the fact, she was away from him, on tiptoe, reaching up to the top of a shelf. She placed before him an egregiously large, heavy inkstand, with a very small quantity of thickened ink in the well. He watched her with what seemed like stupid attention—stupidly close.

"There's some paper in the drawer, or there ought to be, anyhow!"

She lifted the table cloth and pulled the drawer open, with a pull so sharp and ungauged that it fell out on the floor, and paper, old letters, penholders and nibs, string and ribbons and pins were scattered. Alec jumped up: they both stooped and gathered the things from the floor.

"You shouldn't have pulled so hard."

"What I should do and what I do do are two different things."

"Yes, I know. They always are."

"Why don't you come and see me at the show? You might as well."

He did not answer. Their sudden intimacy bewildered him, he was bewildered by his sense of the natural odour of her hair, by the way it involved him. Alarmed, he protested against his exultation.

"I suppose you're always busy in the evenings. Mother says you're never in."

"Oh, I—I could be." Mrs. Barnfield was her mother: a remarkable fact.

"You're lucky. You can do what you like. I wish I was rich!"

"I'm not rich."

"Well, I wish I was a man then. I wish I was older and could do what I liked. I wish I was as old as you. Anyhow, it's not as though I was a kid any more, that's something." She shot the filled drawer back into its place.

"You're pretty young, though."

"When I'm sixteen—that'll be next December—I'm going to put my hair up, off the stage, I mean I am. I'm just sick to death of being a flapper! There's the paper; I wouldn't copy that old stuff if I were you. Too much like work!" She leaned over his shoulder, letting her glance rest for a moment on the page where his eyes were fixed. "Cheer up, Billie! You're not dead yet!" She pinched his coatsleeve.

Alec stood up abruptly and faced the girl.

"I must go," he said. "I must. You see—I have to go away, you see—" He put out both hands to

her, with no will for the act he took her young arms. "I can't stay any more—"

"I say, you're hurting. That's my arm, you know, thanks awfully. What's up, Billie? What's it all about?"

"I didn't mean—" He relaxed his grasp. "I didn't know—I'm sorry."

"You're a rum sort of fellow, not knowing what you're doing." Betty rubbed her arm.

"I didn't mean to hurt you—I oughtn't to—I'd no idea—I'd better go, really I had."

"Who's stopping you, then?" She drew back, her eyes shining at him with the mischief and the pleasure of her satisfaction. "Good-bye, Billie, I must le-ave you!" She put one foot forward and struck a stage pose, chin tilted and eyes upturned. "Parting is such sweet sorrow, oh! Did you know they tried to make me play Juliet, and I couldn't do it for toffee? When she started seeing snakes and kicking up all that dust about it, I had to laugh, an' old Tubby got so wild with me he nearly went off pop! Such times as we had. Never no more, as the raven said. Not now the war's over. Three cheers. I always said we'd win the damn thing," she drawled, "didn't I, Chorlie?"

She flung up a leg, caught the toe in her hand, and on the other toe she spun smoothly round. Alec looked at her, without a smile. He set tragic eyes on her foolery.

"Is it hard, doing that?"

"Oh, that's nothing! I'm light, all right, though,

aren't I? Light on my feet. Tubby says I'm overweight, the old beast, says I ought to drink vinegar and not eat cake or sweets. But I don't weigh so much, do I, not more than I ought, just you see!" She went to him, very innocently.

"No, of course. I—I'm sure you don't weigh too much."

"Now just look! If I haven't got a spot on my dress! It's ink, I think it is. However did I go and do that?"

"Where? I don't see it."

"Don't look too hard, you'll strain your eyesight. Funny eyes you have. Wouldn't like to meet *you* alone on a dark and stormy night."

"Look here. Did I hurt your arm then?"

"Oh, that's all right, don't mention it, the pleasure is mine! Your eyes *are* queer, Billie, they're like—I don't know what. No, you don't!" Pretending to think he was going to catch at her arms again, she put her hands on his wrists. "Seems as though they don't match your hair, yet they do, sort of. Poor Billie, he looks so upset, I bet he's got the toothache. Which side is it on?"

"You mustn't do that!"

"Poor thing, I didn't know it hurt." She went on stroking his cheek, her eyes laughed.

"I don't want you to do it!"

He kept on hoping that he had hurt her arm. There was her parted mouth with its loose curve . . . he felt . . . how could he feel that? Betty knew at

once what he felt, and she looked at him accordingly.

"I suppose you're a real good boy, aren't you?" she observed, after a moment.

"'Good'?" He was relieved by her having said something. "I don't care about *that*—'good' doesn't matter—it wasn't *that*—"

"'Good's' what I am, Billie. That's me."

"Yes, you look as though you were, there's something— But I suppose you can't be, really?"

"Well, you've *nerve*! I s'pose you think just because—oh, what should I care what you think? Doesn't matter to me."

"I wouldn't mind if you weren't 'good.'"

"Oh!"

"Or if nobody was! I don't believe in that. It's something quite different—how could I tell you? I can't."

"What's the trouble, Billie? Come on, tell us, might as well." She was eager and friendly.

"Oh, I've been made an utter fool of, that's all! It's not your fault—but I won't be, not again, I won't!"

"*My* fault! I like that!" She laughed uneasily. He was pale, his eyes looked different, she was interested intensely . . . his eyes. . . . His girl was going with another fellow, she was glad. "Never you mind, Billie."

"Oh, I'll take good care—! I wish you *did* know." He looked closely at her. "Good-bye," he said, and was gone.

The little girl was left puzzled, indignant. She

stood quite still, wondering what it would have been like if he had kissed her. She thought of a boy who had, and then, at once, she hadn't liked him any more, she hadn't cared, but, before, she thought she did, a little. . . . It wouldn't have been like that with Billie. . . . Why hadn't he? "Kissing's nothing!" "Damn that old scrapbook!" she thought viciously, catching sight of it lying open at the page of the Acrostic verse. She took it and tore the page out. She crumpled it up fiercely; then, instead of throwing it away, she uncrumpled it and read it through. She wanted him to have it, to keep it. He'd liked it.

Alec, upstairs in his room, lay exhausted. He'd been flung down, left there. . . . His tears came slow and cruel.

CHAPTER XXVI

IT was no less than appalling to Alec that this young girl should be able so to invite his mind and his sense, that she should beckon to him thus from Gillian's region. For all the dissimilarity between Betty and Gillian, Betty was offering—he had a frightful conviction of this—the same thing in the end, the same. The shock of this discovery seemed to have a positive physical force: it smote his brain, then clutched it and held it, motionless and fascinated, up against the full face, the brute and punitive face of the fact disclosed.

In and between the sleep of that night Alec realized more sharply certain identities of his response to either girl, identities that were hideous. In the early morning, and later, there were turnings and changes of the boy's perceptions, shifting focusses of other expressions of that punitive face, other character indications not understood, horribly bewildering. He resolved against the attempt to understand, he resolved to banish the whole wicked matter: but those pain-struck intensities stayed in him, and the two that empowered them, the two that crossed and merged, and separated and conflicted, the two that were alien and akin, kept their torturing play over and through his senses.

Alec's physical attraction to Gillian was not done with. It was a more observable thing now, more a

thing in itself than it had been at first. The usual reactions against first disguising romantic fervours would not have had time yet to work their visible way, but Gillian, in trying to obliterate her physical appeal had thrown the idea of it into Alec's foreground, she had released him for Betty. Betty had freshened that emphasis so unwittingly put, she had quickened and stiffened it for Gillian as well as for herself. She, the new, the unexpected one, the stranger, could bear Gillian's tokens; could show them even more sharply and strongly and stirringly . . . yes, in some ways she could, he knew now, and she could bring something else. . . . It was Gillian who had spoken of young love. Alec suddenly thought of Gillian's encounter with his father that day by the Tower. Suppose his father had found him with Betty? Betty would never have been like Gillian was then, of course she couldn't. . . . He hadn't liked the way Gillian did all that; he'd never let himself know, before, how he hadn't liked it. . . . He must go away. Well, Gillian had wanted him to. Betty didn't want him to, but he would go. It had to end, all of it. He would go away from Betty's house, he would stop wanting Gillian, he had to; he wouldn't take *that*, not ever again . . . something that could be shared . . . and all the lying of the thing, the deceit . . . vile. He must get ready to go. But he stayed sitting on his bed, stayed in the clinging horror of his disgust. He had sense of sin now, sense of evil.

A door opened and shut sharply. Alec was conscious of a moving about outside on the landing, he

sat up stiffly, alarmed. There was a whistle, and, after a few moments, Betty's voice calling her mother. The boy listened.

"What's made you get up so early?" He heard Mrs. Barnfield's voice. "And all dressed up, too!"

"Well, I suppose I can get up if I want to, can't I? What you going to do?"

"Goin' to *do*?" Mrs. Barnfield's tone showed some irritation and surprise. "I'm goin' out to buy some meat."

"What, *now*, you are?"

"Yes, got my 'at on already. You want to come along?"

"I don't know. Think I'll wait awhile."

Alec was conscious of Mrs. Barnfield's descent of the stairs; he waited for the sound of the closing of Betty's door. Had she closed it without his hearing? He waited for what seemed a very long time, then he heard, distinctly, a quite different sound—the drumming of the girl's fingers on the bannisters. At once he went out to her.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Oh!" She started, she laughed uneasily. "Well, I like that!" Recovering herself, she looked straight at him. "Asking me what I want, you've got a nerve! I'll have a Scotch and potass, Miss, and be quick about it!—Come along, Billie, come along down, might as well. Come and talk to us, Billie."

He followed her slowly, he noticed her thin brown stockings. "I'm going away today," he said.

She did not answer, she went straight on into the parlour, and as soon as he was there with her, she shut the door tight.

"Don't you like me, eh, Billie?" There was no levity now, no coquetry, in her tone or manner. She looked hard at him, she stood quite still.

"Why should I tell you?" he said, turning. "What's the good of telling you?"

"I wouldn't ask you, only I know you do."

"Well, all right." He took a step towards the door. "If I tell you that, won't it do?" It seemed impossible to get to the door, past her. All he had done was to bring himself nearer her. "I mean, wouldn't you let me go then?"

"Let you go, what do you mean, Billie? You like me, but you won't— Why?"

"I told you I couldn't. Didn't I tell you? I mustn't."

"'Mustn't'! Silly! You should just see the bruise you made on my arm," she went on with apparent irrelevance. "It looks like anything this morning. Here's that old book." She moved over to the shelf, stooped down, leaned her head so that her black curls slipped over, showing her neck. "I don't want that poem thing." She pretended to tear the page out, then took it from her dress without his seeing. "You keep it, if you want."

"All right. I mean, thank you.—I must go upstairs, you know, and pack."

"Haven't had your breakfast, have you?"

"I don't want any. I mean I do, rather, but I'll go out soon. I'll go out now. There's a place quite near."

"I can make coffee, I make it all right, and there's some eggs."

"It's a place by the Station—you know. It's where I nearly always go."

"You've got a nice handkerchief."

"Yes. It's my father's, though." He pulled it from his sleeve. "I took it by mistake, I had it washed. Would you like it?"

"It's a lovely one. All silk."

"You could wear it somehow, couldn't you?"

She took it from him, shook it out, looked at it. The pleasure of possessing it diverted her. She went to the glass and put the handkerchief round her hair, holding it with her hand behind her head. "Looks all right, doesn't it?"

"Keep it. You could wear it. Couldn't you wear it close to you?"

"What d'you mean, Billie?" She laughed.

"I don't know, I only thought—"

He stood, seeing her broad laughing mouth with its generous animalism. He thought of Gillian's mouth, the intellectual turn it had. Betty was nearer—nearer to something. Ah, she was *different*! She didn't understand, but her brain kept still.

"'Thought'!" She came to him, her mouth still laughing. "You *do* like me! You're funny! What do you think of us, Billie? I'm all right—you know what I mean—" She let her arms drop, touching

him lightly. "I haven't liked any one else, I never have! What do you think, Billie?"

"I told you—"

"I didn't mean anything—you know—" She blushed.

She was grave again now, her breath came brokenly. Alec leant to her, and the fragrance of a young fresh girl, a little agitated by love, began to seduce his nostrils. Was this what Gillian had said he ought to have? He wouldn't, he couldn't! Beginning all over again. . . . Alec revolted with a strength that swept him clear of the drawing of the tide.

"I didn't mean anything we oughtn't," Betty went on.

"Oh, it isn't *that*!"

"I know all about Mother's letting rooms. You don't think I'm—you don't think I'm like that, do you? I wouldn't answer the bell, I wouldn't!"

He did not reply. He saw her pleading lips, her troubled young eyes, and he turned his head. The passionate loveliness of things flashed before him, he rejected it.

"Let me go," he told her, with a decision that could not be defied or cajoled. "You must."

REFUGE



CHAPTER XXVII

*Betty, your eyes dance down my heart,
Eyes gay and grey and wide apart,
That shine with teasing mirth, and yet
Teasing, they're kind. . . .*

ALEC, in the train from Liverpool Street, read over the ingenious artist's Acrostic Verse; he smoothed out that crumpled sheet again.

The important thing to him was to get six pounds. He had spent just about that amount. If he could pay Wilfred back the whole twenty, at once, that would be destroying one trace, at least: that was something that could be done. The boy's mind seized avidly on the idea of this payment, and clung hard to it. For some minutes he thought of nothing else, he held by a recurring effort of will to the refuge of this determination somehow to get six pounds: but he could not work his mind further, could not devise any plan, however improbable, by which the money could be got.

Six pounds. . . . "Envy of April." . . . "Love-ringlets" . . . how did it end up?

*No coming flower or bloom half-sealed
For me blows sweeter up the field
In spring than you, dear girl of spring—
Envy of April, you who bring
Love-ringlets young and rich and fine,
Deep lips that mate with song and wine.*

Alec read in those initial letters the name of the girl who had touched his ailing love and shown it to him, a dead thing. But he did not—he would not!—love *her*. Not again—he couldn't face it again. He crumpled the sheet and threw it from the hurrying train. Six pounds. . . . After all those passionate intimations of life, only dead brute things left, brute dead gods. He had been so certain!

He thought of what this love had done, this love that had been so cunning and brutal and mortal a trickster, this love that was dead. Frippie—Father Collett—he had been made to forget them, he had been closed, insensate, against them, they had been left, forgotten like that bicycle that he left by the side of the road. Doreen, too. . . . Then, his father—

Alec's love had robbed him of his hate. The wrongs of his brother, his stepmother, Aunt Cathy, his mother, could cry for vengeance in vain. Now both love and hate were gone. He could have done something with that hate, at least he could have started, with strong impulse, from it. This he knew, and he knew that now he had nothing, that he was left in weakness and in deprivation.

It was not his disloyalty, his breach of faith to Gillian, it was no such "moral" stir that hurt him. It was the demolition of what had seemed the very fabric of himself, it was the revolutionary shattering of all those high controlling values that were to have held sway for ever. . . . He had been forced, somehow, in some unseen way, unawares, robbed, tricked. A terrible trick—wicked—a sinister and grinning

hoax. Yet he had loved Gillian, he had been Gillian. It had all been real and great, it had been! Yet it was gone. He could trust nothing in himself, after this; he could value nothing, hold to nothing. Betty . . . how different from Gillian she was! No, he didn't love her, he only wanted her: it was something much less, yet it had driven out the other. Alec did not acknowledge the first processes of his love's decline, nor could he estimate Gillian's wilful part in them.

Gillian, whose love was alive, did acknowledge and estimate. She paraded every sign noted in those last days, paraded, watched, and made much of each in turn. It was not that she lacked the usual female inclination against admitting anything wounding to sex-dignity: she had it strongly, and fought it strongly, both on principle and to help herself by the occupation. She looked at herself in the glass, she observed her mouth; and she thought how it must have lost its power for him, day by day, hour by hour. Perhaps her freedom from moral inhibitions had helped to take the edge off his desire. Ah, but she had *wanted* to do that!—It would have been better for her to have been less “emancipated.” Better still for her to have been ten years younger. She thought of Alec, with his experimental boldness of a novice. There was still her “work”. . . . A man and a woman shouldn't have to stay together if either of them didn't want to—hadn't she worked to prove the truth and the justice of that? *He* didn't want to. . . . The magazine . . . “the policy of the magazine”

. . . her sense of her importance, her "purpose," her independence. Alec had taken her old life from her. At least, then, he should not have tired of her so soon! "He ought not to! he belongs to me! he doesn't want me!" She watched the emotional flash of her condemnation of him, she shivered in her detached brain. "Women should have more pride!" The word "pride" sounded extraordinarily cold. The freezing implications of her loss were traced on her mind with sharp little points like the pricks of an icicle. As a moral reformer she dutifully invoked the solace of the reflection that she suffered not from any human contrivance touching sex, but from an ill inherent in sex itself.

She wished she did not feel so sorry for Alec. It would have been easier if she could have felt angry, bitter, really indignant. But her mind wouldn't give indignation or anger a chance: her mind was a withering glare for such relieving emotions. To be denied the safeguard of unreason, that was tragic, it was cruel. Carlyon-Williams had been right when he'd called it an inhuman trick of hers, that trick of exposing and criticizing her womanish promptings. Perhaps if she had followed her impulse and turned on Alec, turned on him savagely . . . oh, she could have held him, she would have reconciled herself to holding him, in spite of everything, if she had been different, if she had not had that abominably scrupulous regard for intelligence! Why shouldn't she have played her game, played for her own hand, been a little less cursedly honest with herself and with him?

Deception would have been better for both of them, and much prettier. . . . Gillian was convinced, now, that if she hadn't been so stiffly, so sophisticatedly honest and proud, if she had let her intellectual conscience go to the devil, and moved unscrupulously, skilfully, in her will, she might have stayed with the boy in a ten years' marriage at the least, binding him to her all the while by the strands of a hundred idealities. Carlyon-Williams could get more out of life than she could, after all! She reflected that it was no doubt from jealousy that she despised Williams.

To have kept her brain nagging at her love, at the boy's love, as she had! To have allowed such a tyranny, which was, after all, stupid! If only she could have been like Doreen Burke. . . . She had been frantically moral, in her way, had adhered with her fanatic brain-conscience to that determined premise of the inequality between them, the impossibility of his loving her for long. It was precisely the most rapid and the most sure way of destroying Alec's—Alec's—his feeling for her. Tears were in her eyes, on her cheeks. The betrayal and the corrosion of love by a thing so studied, so conscious, so made-up and so small—it was small now—as her morality! It had robbed them both, meanly: her brain and its morality had robbed them. It would have been so easy to make herself believe, and him through her, that their glamour was light eternal. They could have gone on together, she was sure—sure of that now. Even at the very end, if it had not been for her ridiculous "clear vision," and her pride, she could have won him back. If she

had summoned even so simple, so natural a quality as tact . . . the tact that she was entirely capable of, but that her "intellectual honesty" habitually compelled her to reject.

When, on her return that day from her Office, she saw the boy walking along the street near her flat, her love for him gave her a new touch. He was a day too soon. He had come sooner than she had said . . . just as he had that time before. Her idea of his expectancy, his impatience of the interval, shot eagerly to embrace her answer to it. Seeing her, he drew his lips grimly: "I wanted to ask you," he began, "I waited so as to ask you—" He seemed to be trying to remember something that he had learnt by heart: then to her "Well, what?" he replied: "I would like to marry you, I still want to, you know." His tone was controversial. Without answering, she walked on with him by her side till they reached her door, and, feeling for her latchkey, "Why didn't you go home before?" she asked him. "Before you'd found out, before I had to— I told you to—you know." She suffered from her hurt indignant voice, and at once she sharply wondered what would have happened if she had pretended to misunderstand him, if she had said yes. At least she would have made it different then, and need she have made it what it was? Need she have made him say: "May I go then?" Need she have had to turn from him so that he should not see her eyes? Need that door have closed, dividing them? The questions lodged with her. She felt wicked because, now that she knew

he did not want to marry her, she could wish so much more urgently than ever that she had brought the marriage about. She knew nothing of Betty. Even if she had given him the chance, he could not have told her.

As she undressed, Gillian thought of Carlyon-Williams. The thought of him relieved her, he could be a sort of occupation, why not? She would make him one. She could touch Alec through him, through the stepmother, she wouldn't lose him altogether. . . . What if Mrs. Glaive came back to Alec, through her? She would still have a sort of power in his life, then. "But what does that matter?"—"I'll do it anyhow! I'll do it out of sheer devilry! It will be something—"

CHAPTER XXVIII

“**A** LEC, you must wait.”

“But I can make it certain, can’t I—
somehow—at once?”

“How?” Father Collett turned away.

“I mean make it so that I can’t get out of it.
You can’t get out of it, can you?”

“Not after the final vows.”

“Can’t you take the final vows at once?”

“My dear Alec, why are they called ‘final’? How
in the world could you take them first? There must
be probation.”

“But I must take them, I want to bind myself
now. Don’t you see, I can’t wait!”

His mouth shook. It was utterly unbearable to
him, this delay. When he had wanted to marry Gil-
lian, he couldn’t: now that he wanted to take religious
vows, there was the same horrible putting off. He
other way was there? Alec felt that it would be tor-
ture to have to stand by himself, to stand, to move,
unbound.

“It makes me afraid it won’t last, Alec, you are
so eager—”

“Oh, it will, but I don’t want to give anything
else a chance of happening in between! I won’t.
Look here, Father; I’ll make it final, I’ll make it

final now, I can. I pray God—you hear what I'm saying?—I pray Him to destroy me, my soul, I mean, altogether, if I don't take the final vows and keep to them. I wish that. It's my will, and I'll always stand by it, I swear to God!"

Alec felt that this declaration would be of enormous import to Father Collett: he could not feel, try as he might, that it was of even considerable import to himself.

"You've no right to use God in that way!" The priest, for the first time in Alec's experience, showed anger.

"Why not? Can't I make myself safe? Can't I get God to make me safe? What is the good of him if I can't?"

"God chooses His own way of helping fretful and disappointed children, He doesn't choose theirs."

"But you always wanted me to take the religious life, you said I—"

"Yes. But not like this. What has happened to you, Alec?" He spoke less sternly, much more sadly.

"You know. I told you."

"It's just because you thought you were in love and then found you weren't?"

"It's because I want to get out of the way of all that, well out of the way, for good and all! I must make sure it won't happen again, that's the only important thing!"

"The *only* important thing? It wouldn't be right, Alec, on those grounds."

"Do you mean you wouldn't receive me?"

"Well. I don't know. I don't know what they— You mustn't press me, Alec. I must think, I must pray."

"You must tell me, please, at once, whether you will or not. If you won't, I shall find something else to do." He got up.

"You'll do what?"

"I don't know, but I won't come back to you. I'll never come back."

"I couldn't have believed you would take such advantage of my affection." Father Collett was pale. "How she has changed you!" he added, with intense bitterness.

"Well, will you?"

"I'll give no promise. I decline absolutely to promise. I will not be stampeded in this way, Alec, it's outrageous, you've no right—" The boy turned to the door. "You must listen to me, you must stay!"

"What for?"

"Oh, Alec, you make me betray myself so terribly! If I did let you go, what would happen then? I suppose I have no right to inquire into your motives," he said weakly, "to take advantage of my private knowledge—"

"You will let me join the Order then?"

"I'll ask Father Renel to receive you as a postulant."

"That will do."

"It must be with your father's permission. You're not yet twenty."

"Oh, he'll give it. When do you leave here?"

"I go to Webley next week. I shall have to come back for awhile."

"I can go next week then?"

"Yes. Say the week after next."

"All right. But I've taken the vows now, I've taken them. And you have to live away from everybody, don't you? Away from women and everything?"

"Yes: there is no outer life. I warn you, Alec—the mortification of the flesh—that's only a phrase to you. Perhaps you won't stand it."

"Oh, I'll stand that."

"The fasting, the long periods of silence. They have adopted a modified form of the Trappist Rule. For many days you would be thrown absolutely upon meditation and prayer, upon yourself, under God."

"Oh, but I could do that, there would be the others. It would be—you'd *have* to, I mean. That's why I could." He had been so far weakened, destroyed so far.

"You would have no money, ever."

"I know. There's nothing in that, though; except that I do want six pounds, now."

"Dear boy; do you think you really—do you think you *know*?"

"Yes, I do!"

Father Collett, praying God for guidance, looked at the boy's hardened face.

"And this has all come from me," he said. "Why

do we struggle to read God's ways? He uses even sin. . . . Alec, she is my daughter."

"Oh. Your daughter? Gillian is, you mean? Oh, yes, you told me about your having—I remember." Finding the pause awkward, Alec added: "I hadn't thought of that, somehow.—I say, I'm sorry I never wrote to you.—I haven't been home yet," he said hesitatingly.

"It's very late. You had better sleep here."

"Yes. You see I came by the last train. The seven something. What time does it leave? Seven thirty-seven—or twenty-seven. That new train." He wanted to ask for a timetable. "You know, Father, it's twenty-seven, I'm almost sure." He went on about the train with a dreamy tenacity, a queer brooding absorption.

"Well, I'll get out some sheets for you. So you came from the Station straight to me?"

"Oh, yes. I wanted to make certain about the monastery—the Order."

"Do you want me for anything else?" Father Collett winced.

"Yes, if you could lend me six pounds. I want to give it back to Wilfred Vail. He lent it to me to go to London with."

"Oh, you asked *him*?"

"I couldn't have asked you, not for that, could I? I'll get the six pounds from my father soon, but I'd rather, you see, just for the time—"

"Of course I'll lend it to you."

"Thanks awfully." Alec spoke with immense relief. "If you could let me have it tonight?"

The priest assented. He looked hurt and worn. He thought of his prayers for Alec, of how he had prayed that Alec should be called to the religious life, to spiritual dedication. God had answered, and not answered him. It was all disquietingly different from his expectation. Father Collett was entangled in wrong-seeming complications of feeling that vexed him deeply, troubled him deeply. He felt sharply his own weakness, he wondered if God, in afflicting him with weakness, could think it just to punish Alec with the weakness as well as himself. Would that be just? He shuddered at his doubt. Only today Alec was with Gillian. "She lost him too," he thought, and could not but be comforted by that.

CHAPTER XXIX

MR. GLAIVE himself opened the front door the next morning to his returning son. He had seen him from the Study window. "So you're back," he said. "You've heard what's happened? She's left him."

"Who?"

"Run away to the Continent. She's taken up capital, no doubt. None of her dividends are due till next month, that I *know*. It proves I was right, it was all a trick to disgrace me and the family. Sheer malice. She never cared for him, he didn't, either—"

"Oh, you mean Williams and—"

"That man and his mistress, yes. She's written, says she'll never come back, says she'll live alone. Simple spite, of course. Not that I would ever dream of receiving—"

Alec walked with his father into the diningroom. Aunt Cathy, the only person there, rose on their entrance and advanced in a frightened and questioning manner.

"Oh, Sidney!"

"Alec come back. Been staying with those friends of his—you know, school-friends, Mellor, that's the name, isn't it?"

"'Mellor'?—oh, yes."

Mrs. Mowry regarded them both with melancholy agitation. "How long ago was it," she went on suspiciously, "since that Dick Mellor came to stay with us? Alec was almost a little boy."

"Yes, yes, quite early in the war. When one's friends still had their men servants."

"You're going to stay at home now, Alec, aren't you?" Mrs. Mowry asked intently.

"No, I'm not, that's what I was going to—"

"As I was saying, the whole thing's utterly beneath contempt. But they're the ones that are hurt most. The man can't help not being a gentleman, of course. . . . Do you remember, Catherine, he pronounced 'valet' 'vally'? The right people—the people who have them, you know—of course they call them 'valets', Anglicize the word. An outsider—"

"I feel so thankful that she's no longer—that she's *alone*, now."

"We have dismissed the whole matter, Catherine. I would ask you to remember that.—I was going to read you this leading article." He took up the newspaper and settled himself in a chair. "Remarkably sound. Ah, there's Mervyn. Alec came back from the Mellors this morning, I meant to have told you yesterday. I want you to hear this, remarkably well put, just what I was telling Resine the other day." He proceeded to read aloud to them, he soon felt as though he had written the article himself, he read it as though he had.

The boys stood uneasily by the door. They had

hardly looked at one another. Mrs. Mowry sat with an air of patient intelligence, her hands clasped. Alec thought of the last time the four of them were assembled; he thought of Frippie, wondered how it could be that Frippie was so utterly blotted out.

The reading ended, and the boys escaped abruptly. Alec felt disturbed by his brother's presence. Of course Mervyn would ask him questions, and he wouldn't be able to tell him, he couldn't possibly make him understand. Until they got to the shrubbery, well away from the house, neither of them spoke. Then Mervyn said suddenly: "The day's fixed."

"Fixed? What is?"

"My gettin' married, of course, what d'you think? Twenty-second of September."

"Well, you don't care about her, do you?"

"Shut up. What are you rubbin' it in for?"

"It's a good thing you don't, that's what I mean. You ought to be glad you aren't in love, it's a good thing, it is really, I tell you I know—"

"Don't talk rot."

"It isn't rot, I tell you. I mean you won't be like me, you'll never have that sort of— It'd be awful having it if you were married, it'd be even worse, you see. I never will, though, I'll take good care!"

"What the deuce are you babblin' about? You know what I found out? The guv'nor had a book sent him, some book about cuckolds, that means men whose wives aren't on the square—and it was old Resine who sent it, what d'you think of that, turned down the page, foolin' the guv'nor, d'you see?"

"Well, what—?"

"I wish to God I could tell him!"

"Why don't you then?"

"Not much wedding then, you bet, but, Lord, I can't, it'd be too low down."

"How good you are!" said Alec contemptuously.

"'Good'? What do you mean? I'm not 'good.' Simply can't do it, that's all, wish I could. Damn nuisance."

"Perhaps it wouldn't make any difference."

"Of course it would, you ass. Don't I know the guv'nor? One thing he can't stand at any price, bein' laughed at. He'd never forgive Resine, never would; do anything to spite him."

"Well, I'd tell him." Alec was listless.

"Can't. I got to know through Dolly, you see that's why I couldn't possibly— Wouldn't be fair, anyhow. Oh, damn. Don't suppose the whole business matters so awful much, after all."

Alec did not feel inclined to contradict him, but "Anything's fair," he said, "when everything's so unfair."

"What's that? Damn funny way of talkin'."

"Life's only like a sort of cheap suit, that's all, not worth taking care of, isn't worth keeping clean, or anything."

"Aunt Cathy gets on my nerves. You know she got wind of my wantin' to back out, guv'nor told her, I suppose, an' she said she'd given Nita some things, blest if I remember what they were, family things, bloomin' lace or something, and she nearly started

blubbin' over the idea of havin' to take them back. Women are the limit. She said we'd make such a handsome pair. Pair of trousers. Then there's old Resine," he went on more fretfully. Alec noticed that he looked older, noticed a little twist of set ill-humour about the corners of his lips—he wasn't so goodlooking. "Old Resine, with that 'As I always say'—you know. Makes me sick. 'A bird in the hand, as I always say.' 'She's no chicken, as I always say.' 'Tell it not in Gath, as I always say.' And Mrs. Resine's gettin' fatter an' fatter, looks it all the more when she's dressed up, like she will be at the wedding. Says she thinks of me as her 'real son' now, says I must call her 'Mother.' God, what bindles!"

"I say, what was it like when you first found out that you didn't care about Nita any more?"

"Oh, shut up. I don't know."

"'Don't know'!"

"It was so beastly gradual, I didn't think about it at first, didn't want to think. . . ."

"It wasn't that way with me. It was—"

Alec broke off. Mervyn evidently had no interest at all in the way it was with him. There was the guv'nor, thinking of nothing but the Williams business, and there was Mervyn only thinking about this marriage . . . both of them the same.

"I'm going to join the Order at Webley," he announced, raising his voice against his brother's indifference.

"What for? You aren't really, are you, bet you get fed up."

"No, I shan't, I—"

"I'll get used to it all right, I suppose—"

"Oh, that's all you seem to be able to—"

"Oh, well." Mervyn stared, still invoking the poisonous leer of custom. "Well, what's the idea?" He broke his consoling reflection. "Devilish lively idea, I must say."

"What'll the gov'nor do?"

"Oh, 'won't trouble him. Get you off his hands. He'll save money. Besides, it's a fairly classy thing to do, joining an Order. It occurred to me, you know, about Dolly. Of course we couldn't marry. If she had to be a servant, that's what I've been thinkin', why the devil shouldn't she go and get some money out of it? Get well paid. They are, now. More than I could do for her. Why shouldn't she, eh?" He seemed much impressed.

"'Classy'? Why is it classy?"

"What, housework? Oh, that bloomin' monastery. Who's the chap who runs it, some relation to Lord Beauvais, isn't he?"

"Father Renel."

"Oh, yes, he's an 'Honourable.' That's good enough, that'll settle it with the gov'nor. Good old gov'nor, don't worry about him. He'll come out all right one way and another, don't you fear."

Alec remembered how he had thought of killing his father. Now, he wouldn't have raised his hand.

Mervyn was silent. He was thinking about the marriage, of course, about Nita or Dolly. The gov'nor was thinking about the Mater in France or somewhere. Aunt Cathy . . . she was no good: thinking about her lace, perhaps, thinking of one little thing after another, the way she talked. Alec wanted to go to Wilfred Vail, but he shrank from having to admit to Wilfred that it was all over so soon. Now that he had the six pounds it did not seem so important to give it back, and there was pain for him in the prospect of meeting his friend, because they really liked one another.

CHAPTER XXX

THE visit to Wilfred Vail hung waiting for more than a month, until Alec's refuge at Webley was settled and immediate. Mervyn's departure with his bride for Derbyshire diverted the dull strong shallow current of Alec's persistency, brought him an intervening loneliness and heavy wondering that turned him to his friend.

A letter from Gillian, received on the morning after his brother's wedding, gave the boy further need of Wilfred Vail. He could not understand the letter, which Gillian had written for the mere relief of writing it, her conscious reason being that she must make a last effort at clarifying the situation by honesty and frankness. Her "sheer devilry" had failed her sadly, and she tried to describe the poor collapse of the mood in which she had wanted to act with Williams, who, when she met him, had heard of Miriam's escape to France. She had seen him fresh from the blow; she pictured, with an irony wasted on Alec, his "fortitude," his "unshattered faith." She presented an image of the successful idealist, his faith unshattered, turning his fine back on the changeling faces of his misadventures. She was candid enough to admit that she was edged by a malice not free from envy. "Why should she envy Williams?" Alec thought. "Because he isn't in love, because she's un-

happy?" He reflected vaguely: his reflection had little to do with him.

He found Wilfred reading a book about agricultural machinery. His friend's familiar look of mild and lucid satisfaction struck him freshly; but, unlike Gillian, he was not envious. He knew that what Wilfred had was not what he himself could have had, but had missed. Wilfred got up and regarded him closely.

"Well," he said, "so you got tired of your new toy."

"Oh, you think that was all it—all I—"

"I knew you were bound to take it seriously, however it went. Well. And how far did you go? We may as well stroll in the garden, that's something you can do under any circumstances. Without indecorum. I was thinking about you this morning." He took Alec's arm and they went out together. "Now about your affair? I gather, from developments, that it must have been something more than, shall we say romantically Platonic?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Your first, then. And hers?"

"Of course!"

"Good." Wilfred nodded benevolently. "Forgive my unseemly curiosity.—That's to your credit, Alec. Virginity is a grace at sixteen, an inconvenience at twenty, and a curse at twenty-five. Politics are rather interesting just now. There's no doubt, you know, that your father is a very clever man."

"I hope I'm not clever, then."

"No. You might have been a sort of a genius with a few additions and alterations, but your qualities were put together so that they wouldn't work. Who knows, though? They may. Don't let me depress you!"

"I don't want them to work—"

"Your father's qualities certainly work admirably. Look at those roses, they'll soon be gone. That fellow Perry ought to give him a testimonial, but no doubt he'll give himself one instead. I like the yellow ones the best, the yellow roses. He's getting on famously, certain of the seat now, absolutely certain. But what a mistake that was, that affair in Ireland, killing Matcham, whoever did it—"

"Matcham! What do you—?"

"Didn't you know? In this morning's paper. He was shot in one of those Irish brawls."

"Who shot him?" Alec's voice shook.

"A stray bullet, so they say. It was probably arranged. Yes, he was shot dead."

"What do you mean, 'arranged'?"

"Oh, people will fight just as hard to keep what they have as to get what they haven't. They'll fight harder. More unscrupulously. I don't blame them, but this was a stupid thing. Your father knows better. He knows how to keep his head and do little things in the right way. Funny what little things please them. Yes, and it's a funny thing, Alec, but it's perfectly true, that a man will fight with more energy and more passion to keep his position in society—his town house, his country house, his big motor

—than he will to get food when he and his family haven't enough of it. That's why the economic revolution is impossible. Don't you think of these things? You'll realize when you're a bit older, you'll know—"

"What's the use of knowing things like that? I don't want to. Thank God, I'll be out of it, I'll be out of all that—"

"Oh, we have to know how to take it, of course."

"It's awful, about Matcham. I shall never forget him. I'll never forget that time I heard him speak."

"Oh, that speech about the 'brute gods.' Yes, you told me. Solemn trivialities—"

"I didn't know Love was a brute god, though, not then. Matcham— He made me see—in a sort of way, though it wasn't clear. But he set me going. Then I was stopped. That other thing."

"How hard you take it. After all, what is it that's happened to you? You fell in love, and you fell out of love. The mask dropped more quickly than usual, apparently. The rose-pink mask. Mask of rose. Well, it dropped, and you were terribly shocked and jolted, of course you were. But yours is an endlessly common experience."

"It isn't common. Not the way it happened to me. Oh, it was such beastly lying, it was such treachery and deceit!"

"It always is. Love's the eternal impostor. A brutal betrayal, I suppose it is, and it always will be, no help for that. 'Whom God hath joined—' Was

that divine irony or merely celibate ignorance, I wonder?"

"I suppose I was hit too soon and too hard, too many things at the same time—different things all at once. It sounds absurd, but I really do feel finished. I don't feel I can start again. I can't stand anything more of that sort."

"Why not try something of a different sort, then?"

"That's just what I am doing. I'm joining that Order of Father Collett's, the one at Webley. It's all settled now."

"Oh, dear, yes. I've heard, of course. I don't take it seriously in the least. You'd never be fat enough for a monk. This is the place where we felt that sudden warm breath of wind, you remember? Last summer or the summer before. Strawberries were in season at the time, and I knew nothing about motors. You've grown up since then, I can see you have. A little bit, anyhow?"

"It's horrible, brute force. . . . And Matcham had a fine face. I remember just how he looked. A bullet can break a brain, you can't get over that. Just brute force. It's how things are. It's awfully deep down in everything, and it's horrible. You can't stop it anyhow. You said yourself that if the brute gods were pulled down there'd only be new ones grow up. That's true. I can't stand it. I suppose it's human nature I can't stand—human nature in me too, perhaps—"

"Oh, quarrel with the world as much as you like! Why not? Let's go to lunch."

"The queer thing is that though it was I who left off being in love with Gillian, she'll get over it and I won't."

"No." Wilfred led him back towards the house. "You won't get over it in that Order of yours, where I expect you'll stay a couple of months. I said you'd grown up, but you may be something of a baby even now. I can't believe in this irreconcilable quarrel with human nature at your age. You'll grow out of that."

"It would be much worse if I did. But I don't want to 'quarrel' with human nature, with the world. I do know I can't help and I can't stay in it, the whole thing's too horribly clear. I can't live it out. And I can't kill myself. I couldn't even kill my father. I don't think I'm a baby now in any way that will help me. Of course if I were stronger I wouldn't be doing this, I know that. But then if I were weaker, I wouldn't either."

"But be practical. The point is, don't let Nature quarrel with you. No one could be less intended for abstinence. And after that affair in London, of course that'll make it worse. What will happen is—to put it plainly—" He put it plainly, and vividly.

"Oh, that's nothing. I can easily put up with that. Oh, I forgot, here's that money. Thanks awfully."

"Well, I'm damned!" Wilfred stopped and examined the notes that lay in his palm. He was visibly impressed by the presence, within so small a compass, of such considerable purchasing power. "That don't look much i' th' hand," he observed

slowly, in Suffolk. "But that fare a lot t' part wuth. Don't you want to keep some of it?" He continued to regard the money, his expression was half-puzzled, it was unworldly. "If I buy a new lathe now, I shall feel just as though you had given it to me."

"That's what interests you!"

"Did I hurt your feelings? I'm sorry. But after all, however bad the world is, there are still motors, and cigarettes. We've time for one before lunch, I think."

They turned back down the path, smoking, and Alec felt that it would be hard to part with Wilfred. How well Wilfred could get on, without being bound! The boy, occupied painfully with their friendship, became inattentive.

"You see," Wilfred was saying, "you've sown your wild oats in such a tearing hurry that the crop won't grow. Not in the right way. That's what I'm afraid of. You'll have to do it all over again. You always were impatient."

"I've thought about that. This sex thing. It's either marriage or 'wild oats' or cutting off altogether. I'd rather cut off, and I don't think I'll want to change, whatever happens. Marriage would be worse." He thought this would appeal to his friend. "Marriage would be worse than the Order."

"Ah, well then, why not give debauchery a trial? 'There were three young men of St. Louis, The pandar, the rake, and the roué—' But I'm perfectly serious. You need a purge of some sort. A month or two of unbridled dissipation in, say, Port Said or

Tangier—something quite new—would get all this out of your system. With the proper precautions. Of course I can't recommend these places personally, but I have the authority of a friend who's very trustworthy in such matters. I'd even lend you the twenty pounds again, you've repaid it so promptly. Twenty pounds would pay your fare one way, anyhow."

Alec shook his head with a strained smile. "Of course debauchery is less serious than marriage," he said, "but it's sillier."

"Impossible. Why rail at marriage, though? We aren't married. So it's to be this religious Order. For life, I suppose?"

"Certainly for life. I have to be a postulant first, but that doesn't—"

"My dear boy, you'll be out of it before you're halfway through your postulating."

"I shan't be."

"Forgive me if I show lack of tact, but you haven't, I suppose, any actual religious belief?"

"Oh, I think I have. Does that matter? Yes, I have. If anything is right, religious belief is right. I mean the real thing, of course."

"The sort of thing you get in Orders?"

"The belief Father Collett has. It must be right because it's so utterly against—"

"Human nature!"

"Yes, and against the world. Yes."

"You show me religion as the last resort of the pessimist."

They were silent, then Alec said suddenly: "Gil-

lian told me once that women—" He stopped. The cleverness in the ring of her words made him shy of repeating them. "She said women had always been the camp-followers of the big battalions."

"Excellent. A capital phrase."

"Well, that's what we all are, it's what we all turn into if we stay here long enough. You won't, of course, but then I couldn't be you. Most people, if they escape one of the battalions, they find themselves in with another."

"But isn't that what you're doing with religion?"

"That's not the same. It's outside the battalions, it's sort of off their ground.—It's my only way, Wilfred, don't try to argue me out of it."

"I wouldn't for anything make you more determined by opposition. I know you, you see. When your mouth goes like that, you might as well try to argue with a seized back-axle or a broken crank-shaft. If you must go running for refuge to the arms of a staggering faith— I wish your Gillian had lasted longer. I like that phrase of hers. I'll pass it on to Teddy. Being a doctor, he'll appreciate it. Most doctors despise women, did you know? It's because they—"

"You see, you can go on, Wilfred, as you are. You have your life. You haven't had—well, you haven't had anything *done* to you. I wish I could explain it better.—I can't stand the—the sort of ignominy of going on, now I'm scrapped."

"You don't look it, Alec, you don't look scrapped. Even though you did get drunk at the wedding."

"Oh!" Alec blushed. "Well, there was nothing else to do! If you could have seen them all! Poor Mervyn— What did you hear about it? I remember going from one end of the table to the other and drinking up all the champagne that was left in the glasses."

"Oh, Carnival?"

"No, I wanted to show them what I thought. I don't suppose I did, though. It was because of the doctor's jokes, and Mrs. Resine. She looked like a fat old—what do you call those old women?"

"'Procuress'?"

"Yes, she looked just like a fat old procuress, there with Nita. Much more like one than Mrs. Barnfield."

"Who's Mrs. Barnfield?"

"Oh, you don't know. It doesn't matter. My father said it was very bad form. Not my getting drunk, so much, he wasn't exactly sober himself. He made a speech, said that his son's wedding made him feel that he'd live for ever. 'Non omnis moriar,' that was what he ended up with, and Mervyn said he hoped a good deal of him would, anyhow."

"Your brother should have said that in his speech of response."

"Oh, no," Alec replied gravely, "he only said it to me. My father didn't hear. He enjoyed everything except my doing that. You know, mopping it up from the bottoms of the glasses like I did."

"Yes. A sort of gesture. I understand. You wanted to reduce the whole thing to the level where you thought it ought to be. Bring it into contempt. That's interesting."

"Something like that, I suppose so. A 'gesture.' I might have found a better one. Perhaps I have—or I shall. I suppose I ought to have seen by what happened to Mervyn, I ought to have— But with him it was so different."

"We'll be late for lunch."

"I'm going."

Wilfred Vail, looking at him, did not press him to stay. "You'll cut through at the end of the near drive?" was all he said.

"Yes, I'm walking back. Good-bye."

"Au revoir."

Alec's reluctance quickened his steps. He resented the memories of Wilfred that came crowding his brain, he ejected them. He replaced them forcibly with thoughts of Father Collett. He recalled his last interview with the priest, and their parting—not a casual parting like this one, although it was only for a short time. Father Collett had spoken impressively, finally. He had made himself believe, by that time, that God pointed Alec. He had talked of Alec's youth. "Your wings of the morning, He has shewn them their way." The boy tried to remember the words, exactly. He had tried the day after his visit to Webley, the day of the wedding. . . . Quotations from the Bible. . . . Father Renel, too; he had quoted something . . . fine . . . poetry. The more wine Alec had swallowed, the more it had seemed to him important to remember: he was so sure that the words would sound finer than ever because of his being drunk. But his memory had continued to

grasp emptily. "What a pity Christianity isn't true!" he had exclaimed; and then: "Damn goo' wine." He recalled now, with shame, how he had repeated these observations at intervals. He wondered how many times? Had many people heard him? It wasn't fair to Father Collett. . . . What was it that Father Collett had said?—"I pray that we may be found worthy . . . worthy to walk together in the sight of the Lord." Yes. Now he remembered quite clearly. And about religion: "Religion is above what the world calls humanity and what the world calls love." "The only remedy," he had called it; and he had used another word. "The only transcendence of the evils of the soul, of the life that most men know." Alec reflected. People like Matcham fought against what they would call abuses in Life, bad conventions. They thought they could do away with them, and make everything all right. But the brute gods . . . it wasn't only that they had the conventions and abuses on their side, they had Life itself. Love that made life, love was in with them, an accomplice. Wilfred Vail saw that, but "he doesn't know it as I do, so it doesn't really matter to him." The last thing Father Collett had said was: "Enter thou into the peace of our Lord." Alec assured himself that he would never leave the Order. Whatever might happen, however he might feel, he would never leave it. The strength of that resolve would be something to live in, whether he believed in anything else or not. Resolved, he walked on, fronting the track cut out before him by his

maimed revengeful will. In refuge, he paid homage; paid blindly, now, to those outraging brute forces their greatest tribute, their ultimate tribute.

THE END



